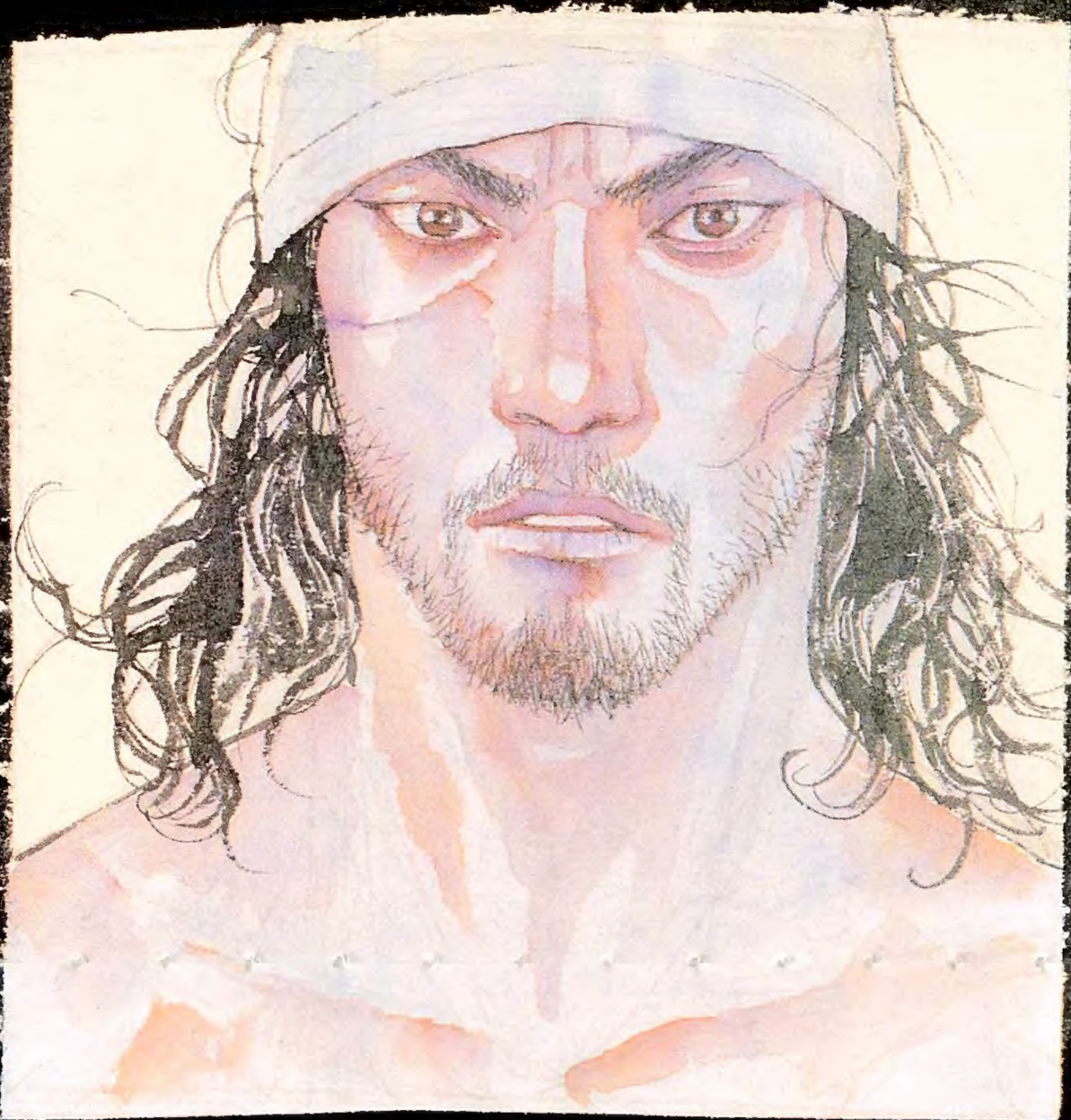
Vagabond
Vol. 29

MUSTN'T OVERDO IT.

COME NOW...

...

#252 | Captive Musashi



IT'S A USELESS STICK.

I CAN STEP NEITHER FORWARDS NOR BACK-WARDS.

LET'S HAVE A LOOK.

ALL RIGHT THEN.

A STICK, EH.

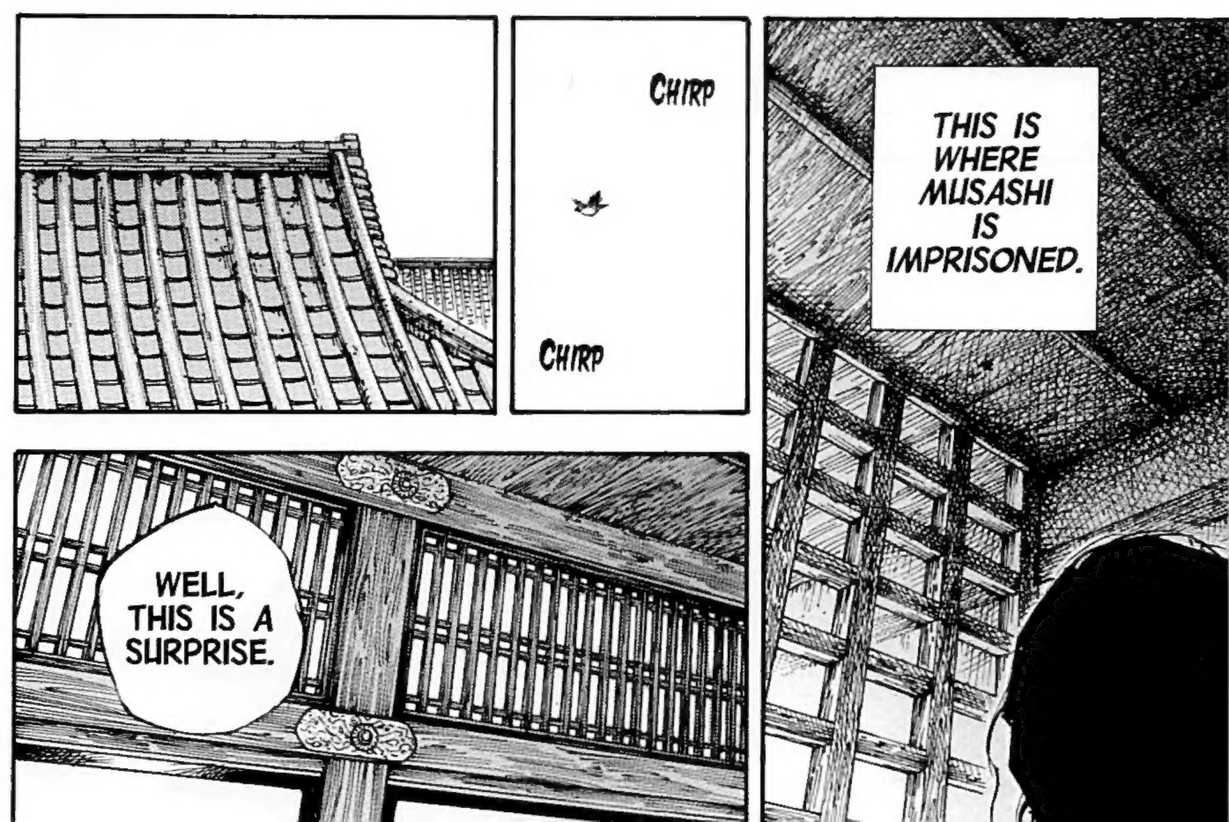
I'LL WRAP IT UP TIGHT.

IT APPEARS AS IF THE HEAVENS...

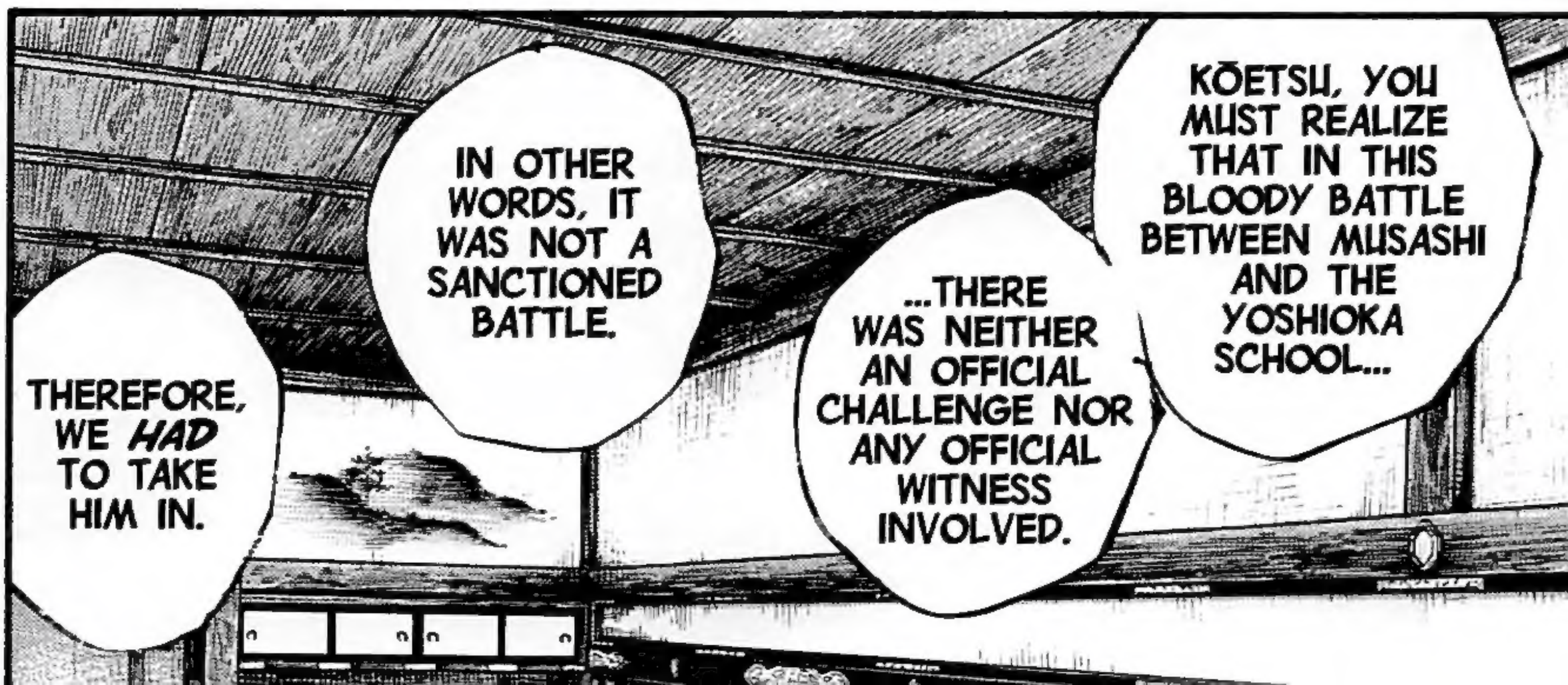
NIJŌ CASTLE...

TO ITS NORTH LIES THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES OF THE KYŌTO SHOSHIDAI.

KŌETSU, I DIDN'T REALIZE THAT YOU WERE AN ACQUAINTANCE OF MUSASHI'S.



ITAKURA KATSUSHIGE, THE KYOTO SHOSHIDAI



HIS ONLY FAULT IN THE MATTER IS THAT HE IS TOO STRONG.

HE KILLED 70 MEN!

HOWEVER IT MUST BE SAID THAT THE FAULT HERE LIES WITH THE YOSHIOKA.

AGAINST 70 MEN, MUSASHI HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO FIGHT FOR HIS OWN SURVIVAL.

IT'S IN MUSASHI'S BEST INTERESTS TO REMAIN CAPTIVE.

AS LONG AS HE REMAINS IN KYOTO, ALLIES OF THE YOSHIOKA WILL HUNT HIM DOWN.

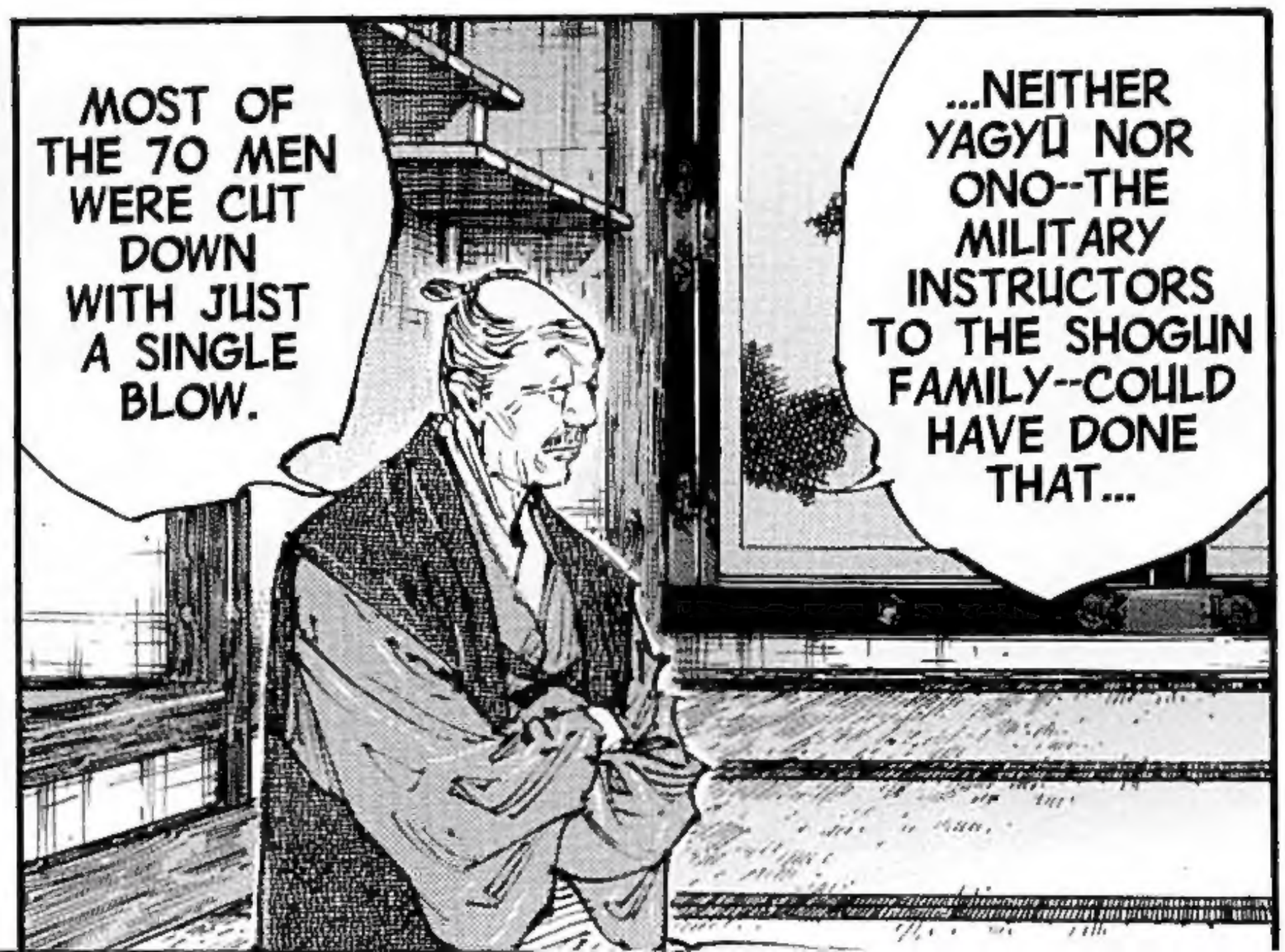
NOT TO MENTION AMBITIOUS SWORDSMEN OUT TO MAKE NAMES FOR THEMSELVES.

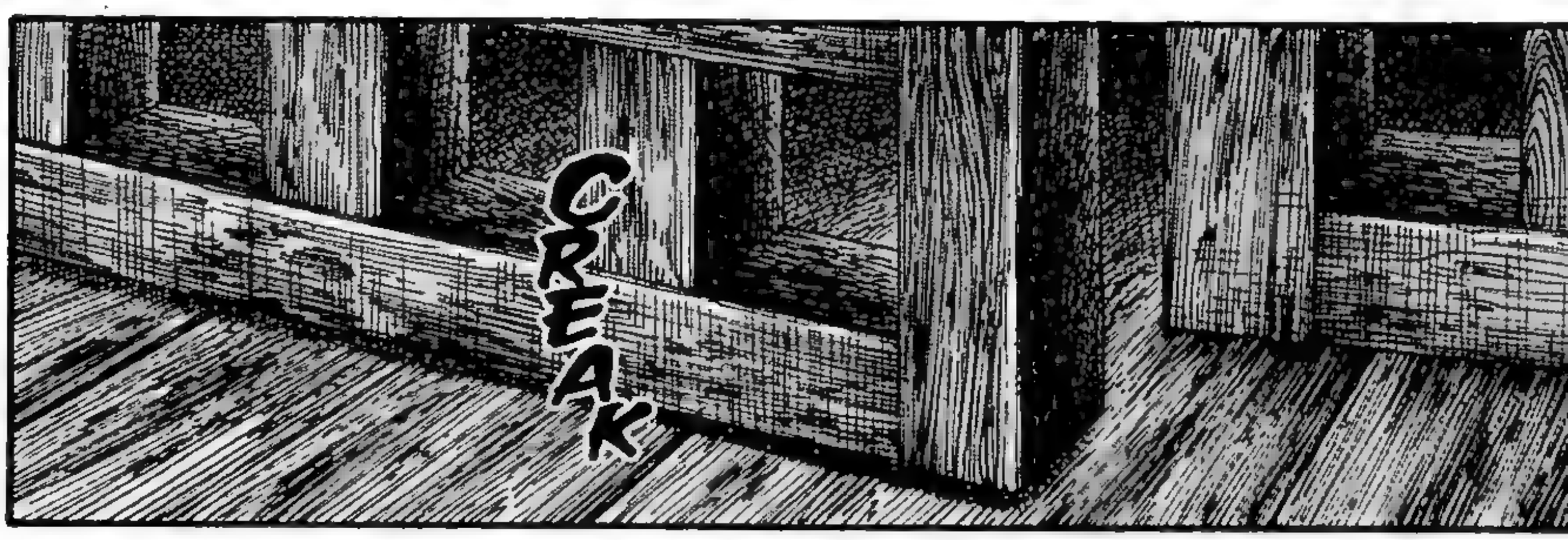
HE SHOULD REMAIN HERE AT LEAST UNTIL HIS WOUNDS HAVE HEALED.

RECRUITING A FEROCIOUS TIGER IS A GREAT BOON FOR ANY WARLORD.

AN ERA OF TRUE PEACE HAS YET TO COME.

DID YOU SEE THE CARNAGE AT ICHIJŌJI?




CREAK

MUSASHI ...
...BE GRATEFUL TO THE PERSON WHO STABBED YOU.

PEACE AND QUIET.

AFTER ALL...

...HE STOPPED YOU FROM YOUR DESCENT INTO THE DARKNESS... THE DEAD END OF HELL...

...

HMPH!

WAS THAT WHERE MY PATH WAS HEADED?

THE DEAD END OF HELL...

DARKNESS...

AS IF YOU'VE BEEN THERE...

CHATTER CHATTER

HMM?

...

THERE HE IS! MASTER!

URGH.

SO YOU GOT THE INCENSE TREATMENT EH, OTSŪ?

MASTER!

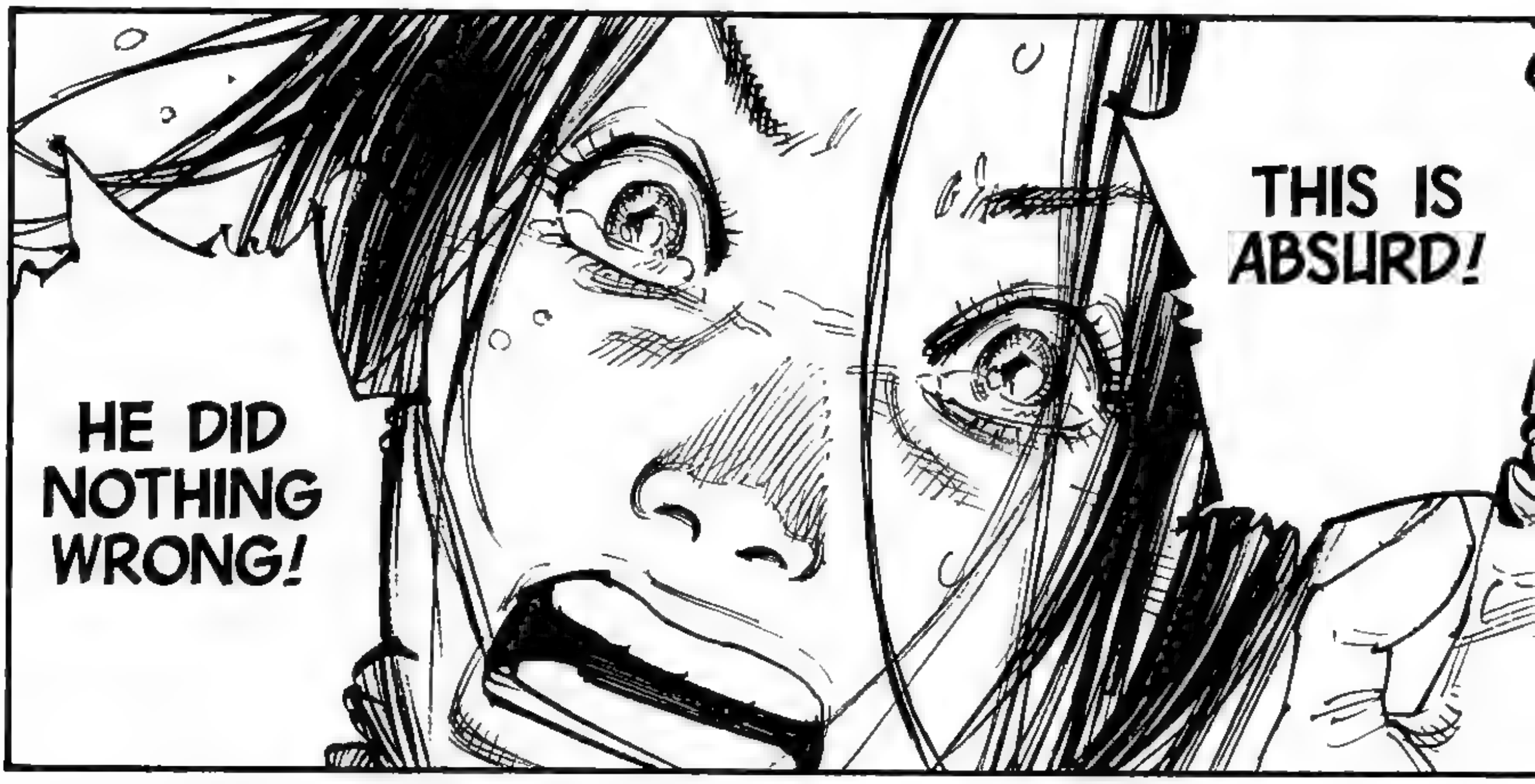
STOP IT, JŌTARŌ. NEXT TIME YOU WON'T GET OFF WITH JUST A SCOLDING!

LET HIM GO!

HE'S DONE NOTHING WRONG!

WHY IS HE IMPRISONED?!

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT INCENSE ?
AFTER THEY TOOK YOU AWAY...


HE DID NOTHING WRONG!
THIS IS ABSURD!

OKAY, OKAY, TAKUAN.
THEY ACTUALLY ATTACKED THE AUTHORI-TIES.

IT WAS QUITE A SCENE.
AT LEAST THEY GOT OFF WITH JUST A SCOLD-ING.
GRAB
KICK
WE WANT OUR MASTER BACK!
THAT'S RIGHT!
YOU'RE BOTH UNDER ARREST !
WHAT THE--?

SLMP
YEAH, BUT...
TAKE IT EASY.
YOU MAY BE A PRISONER ...
...BUT THEY'RE TAKING GOOD CARE OF YOU.
THEY EVEN LET US VISIT YOU.
NOW WHERE WERE WE LAST TIME WE TALKED...?
DON'T YOU THINK IT'S TIME YOU CHOSE ANOTHER PATH, MUSASHI?

HEY, OTSŪ...
SAY, WITH OTSŪ?
ARE YOU HAPPY NOW?

YOUR WISH HAS COME TRUE.

BECAUSE YOU NEVER LIKED HIS FIGHTING.

TARO-CHIN, WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

THAT'S GREAT.

NOW THAT HE CAN'T FIGHT ANYMORE, HE'LL PROBABLY SPEND HIS LIFE WITH YOU.

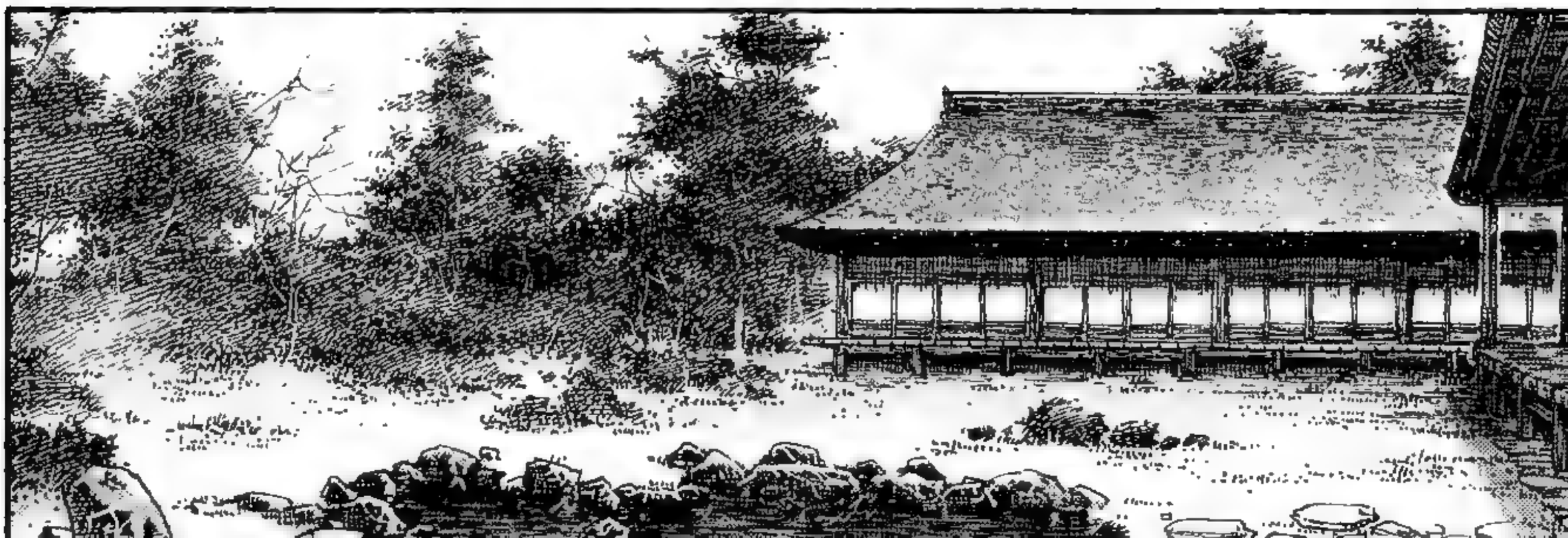
NOW THAT MY MASTER CAN'T FIGHT.

NOW THAT I...

WHAT ABOUT ME, THOUGH?

NOW THAT I... DON'T HAVE A MASTER...

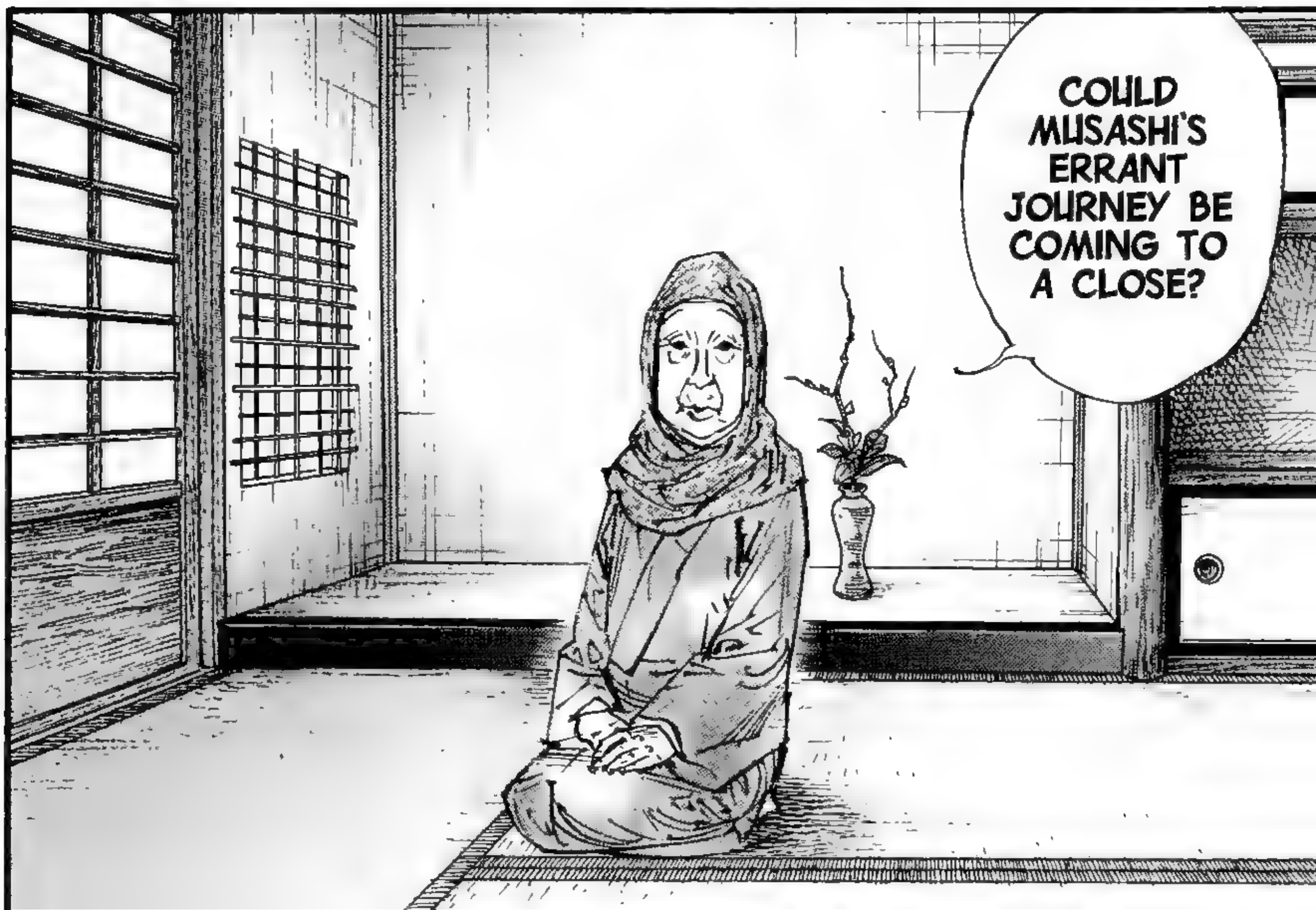
...THAT WE'D BOTH GET STRONGER TOGETHER...



(...REQUEST TO HIRE MIYAMOTO MUSASHI AS SWORD INSTRUCTOR)

LIKE THE EVER CHANGING SEASONS...

...NOTHING CAN LAST FOREVER.



GRRR

宮本武蔵

ARE YOU JEALOUS?

(MIYAMOTO MUSASHI)

DO YOU NOT FEEL SOME ENVY...

LOOKS LIKE MUSASHI HAS BEEN OFFERED A POST.

...NOW THAT YOUR FRIEND APPEARS TO BE MOVING BEYOND YOU?

#253 To Live By the Sword

TO LIVE BY THE SWORD...

...MUST EVOLVE ALONG WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD.

THE MEANING OF SUCH CONCEPTS ...

THEY WON'T HAVE A PLACE IN THESE CHANGING TIMES.

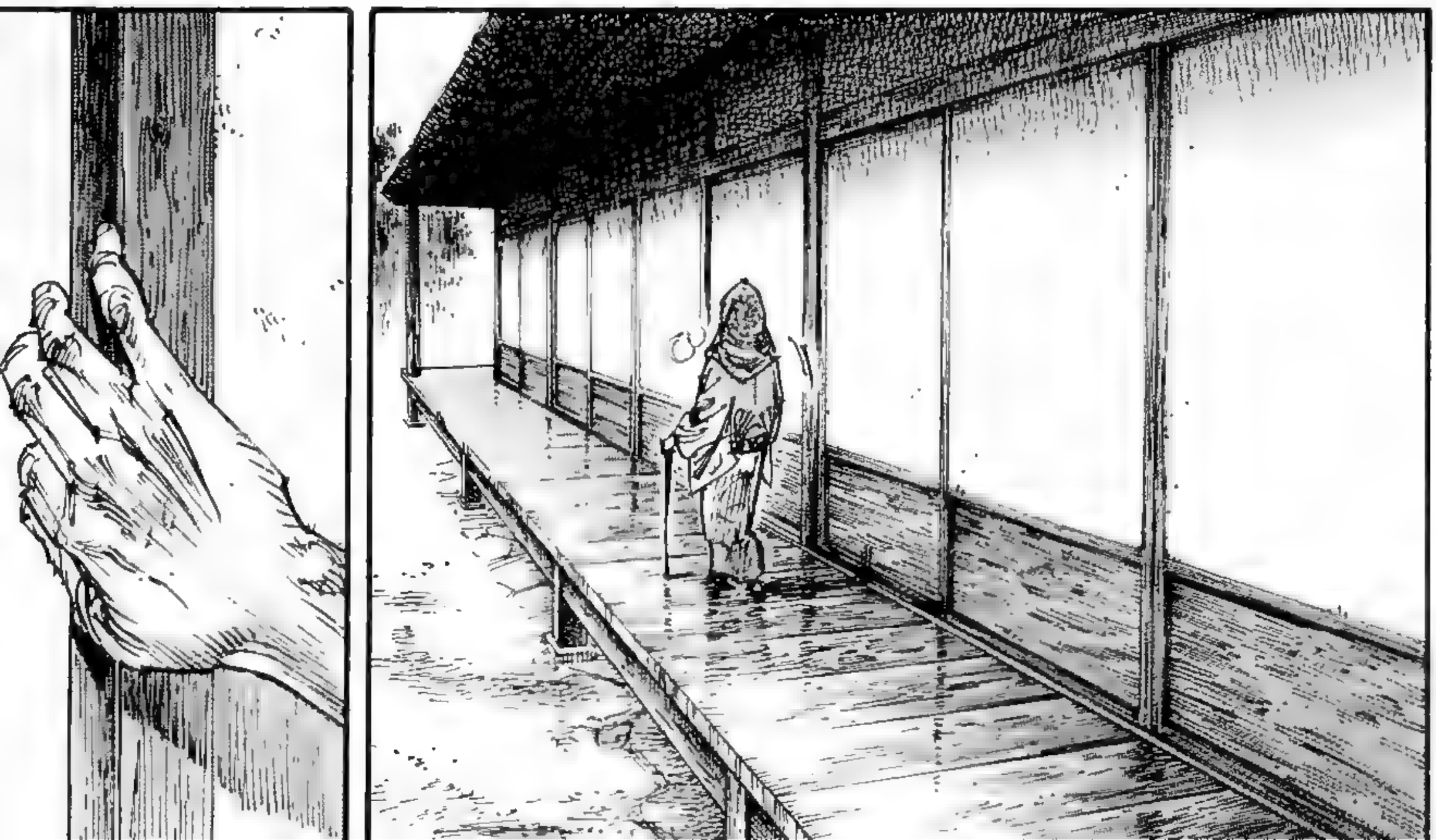
THESE TWO MEN ARE MUCH LIKE THE EMBODIMENT OF THE SWORD...

...SOMETHING THAT CAN STILL BE ENACTED WITHIN THE CONSTRUCTS OF A CIVIL SOCIETY.

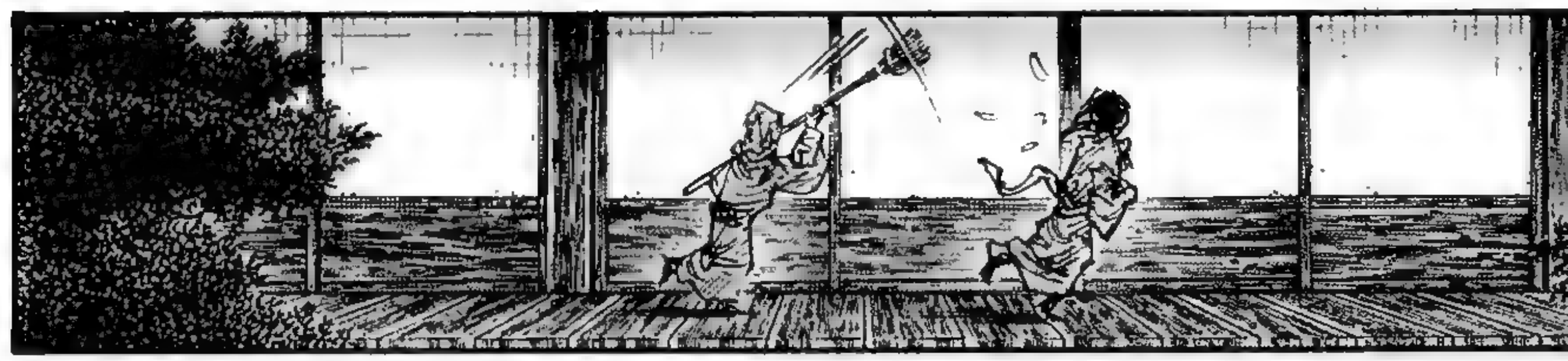
THERE MUST BE SOME OTHER WAY...

...SIMILAR TO THE ACT OF CUTTING EACH OTHER DOWN...

IF THERE WERE, PERHAPS LIFE WOULD BE SLIGHTLY EASIER...
ESPECIALLY KOJIRŌ...
HE IS THE PERSONIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT OF THE SWORD.
...FOR BOTH OF THEM.
HMM...
ISN'T THERE SOME GOOD PERSON HE COULD WORK FOR?
WELL, KOETSU?



NOT ANOTHER ONE!



LET GO!
DON'T COME NEAR ME!
WHAT'S WRONG, TARŌ-CHIN!

OH YES YOU ARE!
I AM NOT.
YOU'RE SO HAPPY.
AH, COME ON.
WITH YOUR CONSTANT HUMMING!
THAT'S NOT TRUE.
HUM-MING?
OH YES IT IS. HUM HUM HUMMING AWAY.
IF HE CAN'T WALK, THEN YOU'LL GET TO TAKE CARE OF HIM.
MY MASTER CAN'T FIGHT ANYMORE. ISN'T THAT GREAT!
STOP LYING!
I DO NOT!
OH, YES YOU DO.
HOW WOULD YOU KNOW! I DON'T HATE FIGHTING!
I'M SO GLAD FOR YOU!
HE WON'T HAVE TO DO ANY MORE OF THAT DESPICABLE FIGHTING ANYMORE.
STOP IT!
OH, YES YOU DO.

HUF

HUF

HOW COULD I EVER HATE IT...

...WHEN THE MAN I LOVE LOVES IT SO MUCH.

THE WAY OF THE SWORD...

HUF

HUF

HUF

HUF

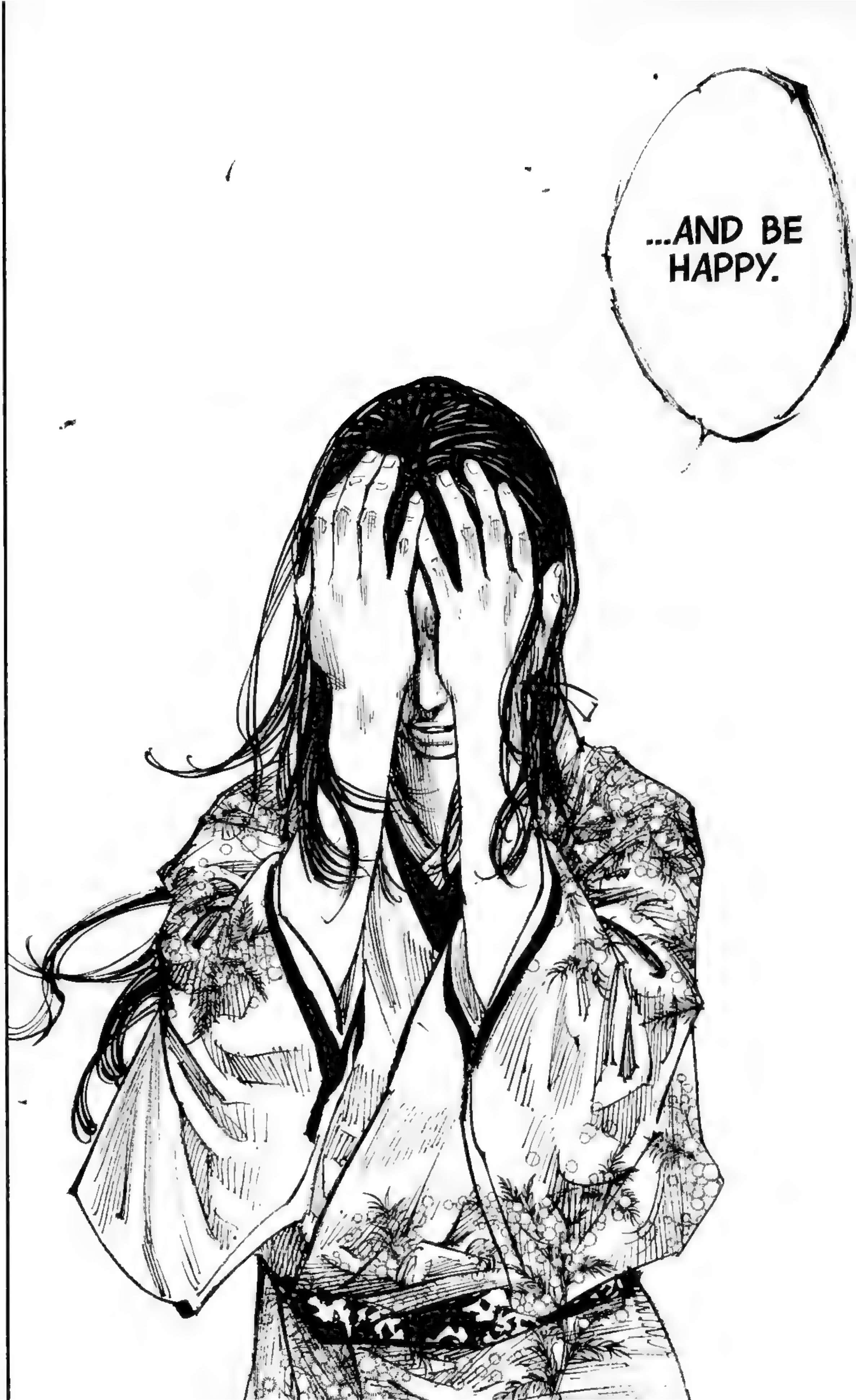
IT'S JUST THAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT.

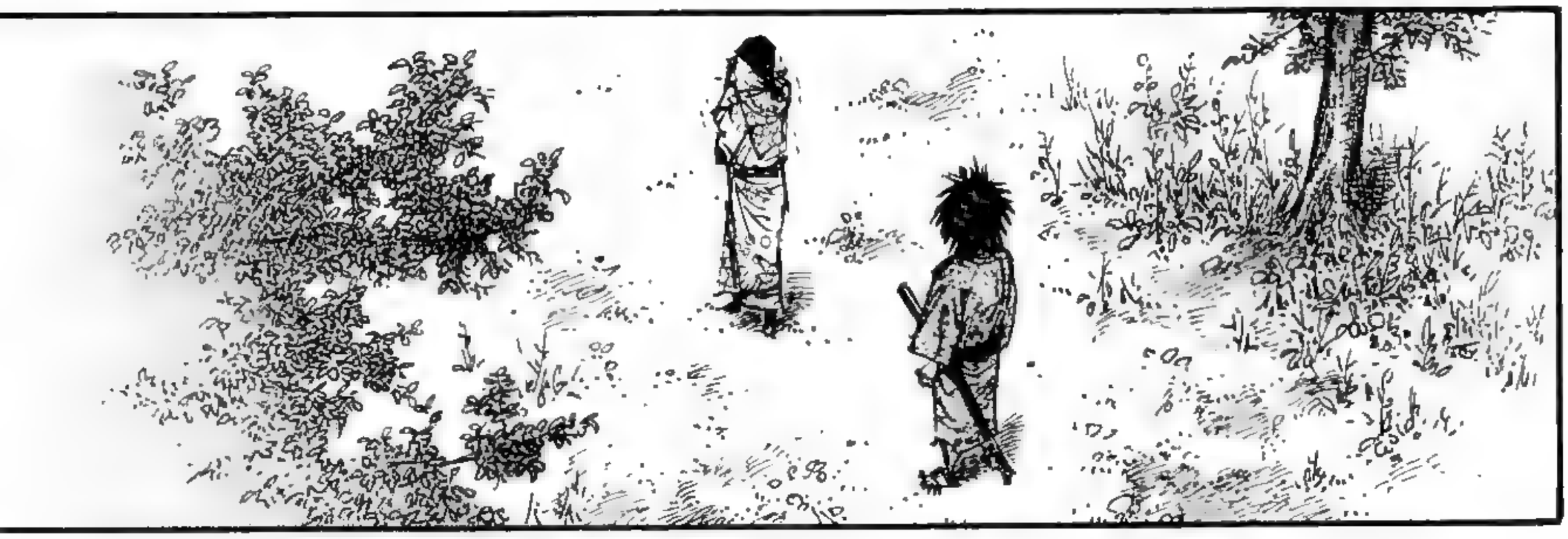
I DON'T HATE IT.

IT'S JUST...

HUF

I DON'T GET WHAT'S SO THRILLING ABOUT SWORD FIGHTING.
WELL, IT'S THE SAME FOR ME.
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW I FEEL, RIGHT?
...AND BE SO RECKLESS?
WHY RISK YOUR LIFE...
LIVE A QUIET LIFE...
BE TOGETHER.
...I WANT TO BE WITH TAKEZŌ.
YOU'RE RIGHT...


...AND BE HAPPY.



SAY, WITH OTSŪ?

DON'T YOU THINK IT'S TIME YOU CHOSE ANOTHER PATH, MUSASHI?

I JUST MET WITH ITAKURA KATSUSHIGE, THE KYOTO SHOSHIDAI.
THERE'LL BE NO SEPPUKU FOR YOU. NO EXECUTION.
IN FACT, THEY'RE LOOKING OUT FOR YOUR INTERESTS.
DON'T YOU WANT TO BE WITH HER?
I'M A PRISONER.
HOW COULD I--

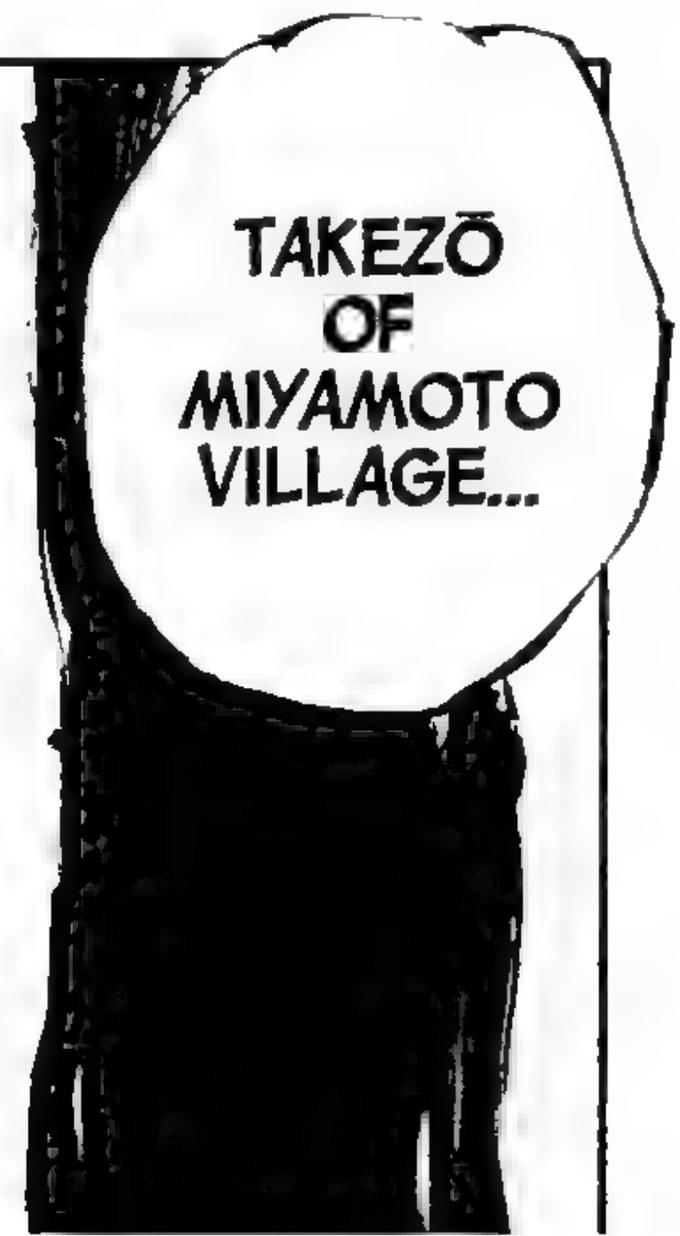
...

HA HA...

THIS IS THE SECOND TIME YOU'RE BEING HELD CAPTIVE.

YOU BASTARD.
HEH HEH...
YOU HUNG ME FROM A TREE...

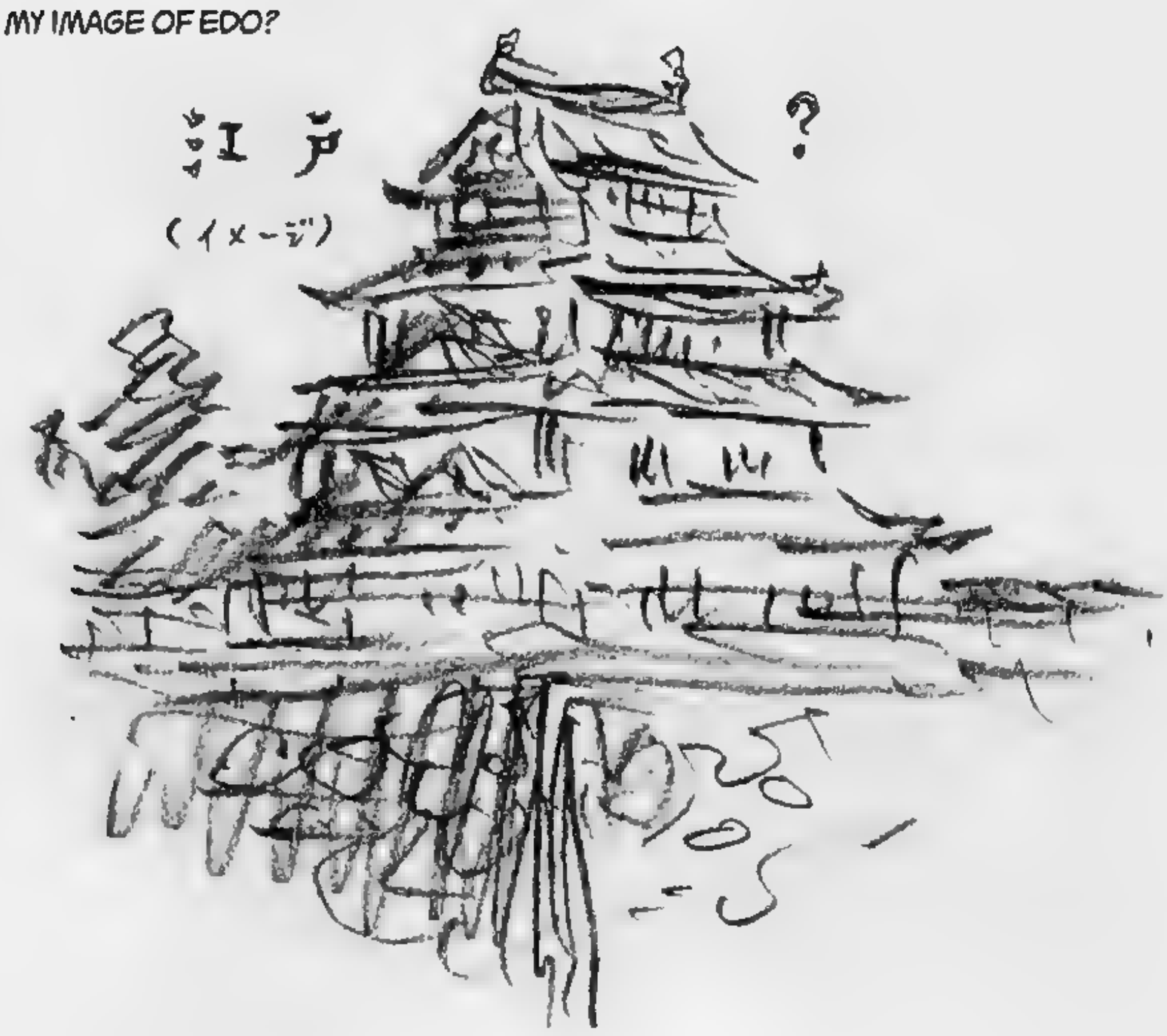
...YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY.


TAKEZŌ OF MIYAMOTO VILLAGE...

WORD IS OUT THAT YOU'RE INVINCIBLE.

PEOPLE ARE LOOKING FOR YOU.

MY IMAGE OF EDO?



JUST DON'T.

HE'LL RUN AWAY THE MOMENT HE FINDS OUT.

DON'T TELL TAKEZŌ.

SOB

BUT WHY?

HE WON'T KNOW HOW YOU FEEL IF YOU DON'T TELL HIM.

HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?

HE THINKS HE'LL LOSE SOMETHING OF HIMSELF IF HE DOES.

HE DOESN'T WANT TO LIVE A QUIET LIFE WITH ME.

BECAUSE I FEEL THE SAME WAY A LITTLE.

...

EVEN IF WE HAVE TO STAY APART...

I PREFER THINGS THE WAY THEY ARE NOW...

...TO LOSING OUR CONNECTION ENTIRELY...

I'D RATHER WE STAY APART...

GASP

YOU'RE JUST THE SAME AS ME.

HE'S STILL MY MASTER ...!!

EVEN IF HE'S NOT WITH ME...

#254 HOME

EDO?

EDO--

WHY EDO?

HIS NAME IS YAGYŪ MUNENORI.

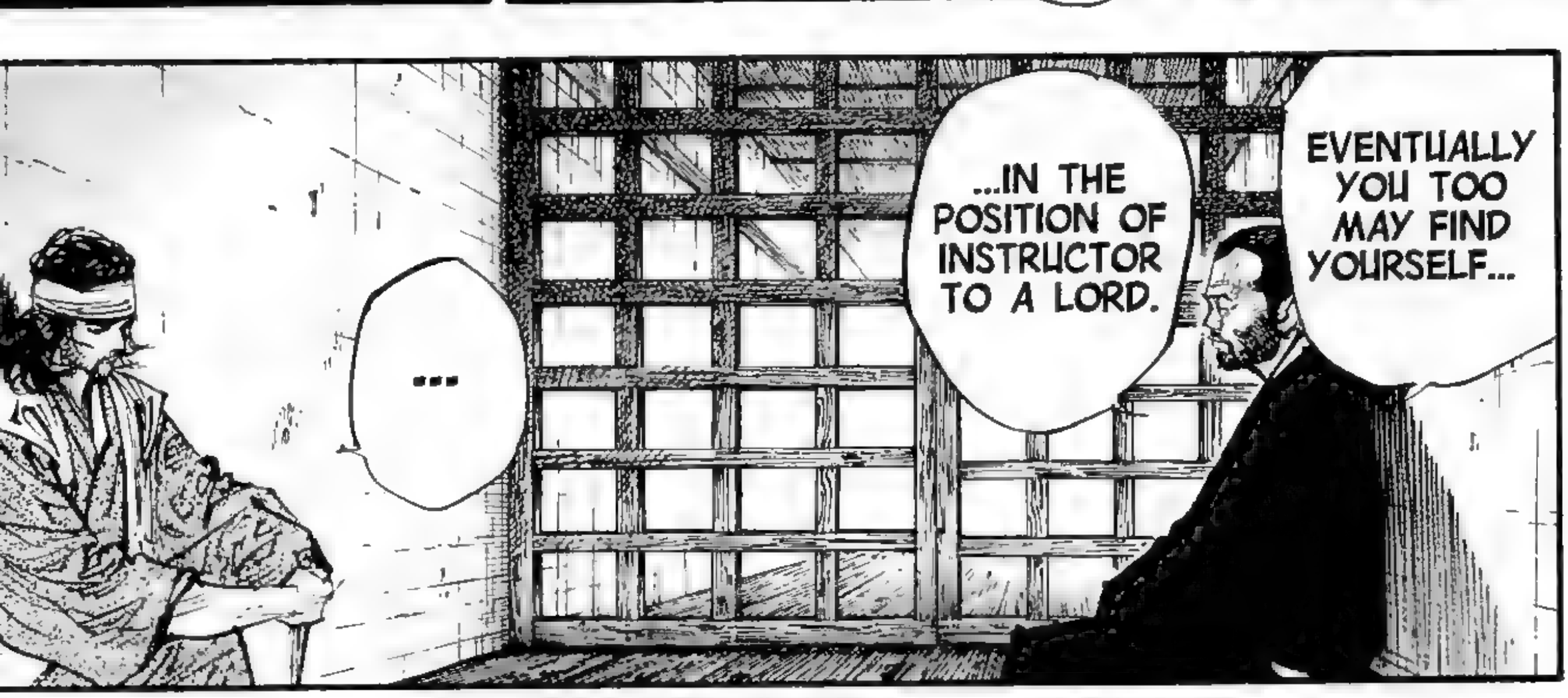
...

INSTRUCTOR TO THE SHOGUNATE?

GLARE

I'M ACQUAINTED WITH THE MARTIAL SWORD INSTRUCTOR TO THE FAMILY OF THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE.

SERVE UNDER MUNENORI AND LEARN A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE WAYS OF THE WORLD.
MUSASHI ...
YOU KNOW HIS FATHER WELL.
MUNENORI IS THE FIFTH SON OF THE YAGYŪ.


...
...IN THE POSITION OF INSTRUCTOR TO A LORD.
EVENTUALLY YOU TOO MAY FIND YOURSELF...

GLMP
YAGYŪ MUNENORI ...

YAGYŪ MUNE-NORI...

GLUP

GLUP

IF I'M STILL HAVING THESE SELF-CENTERED THOUGHTS...

...THEN THE FIRE IN ME IS STILL THERE. I HAVEN'T RISEN ABOVE IT AT ALL.

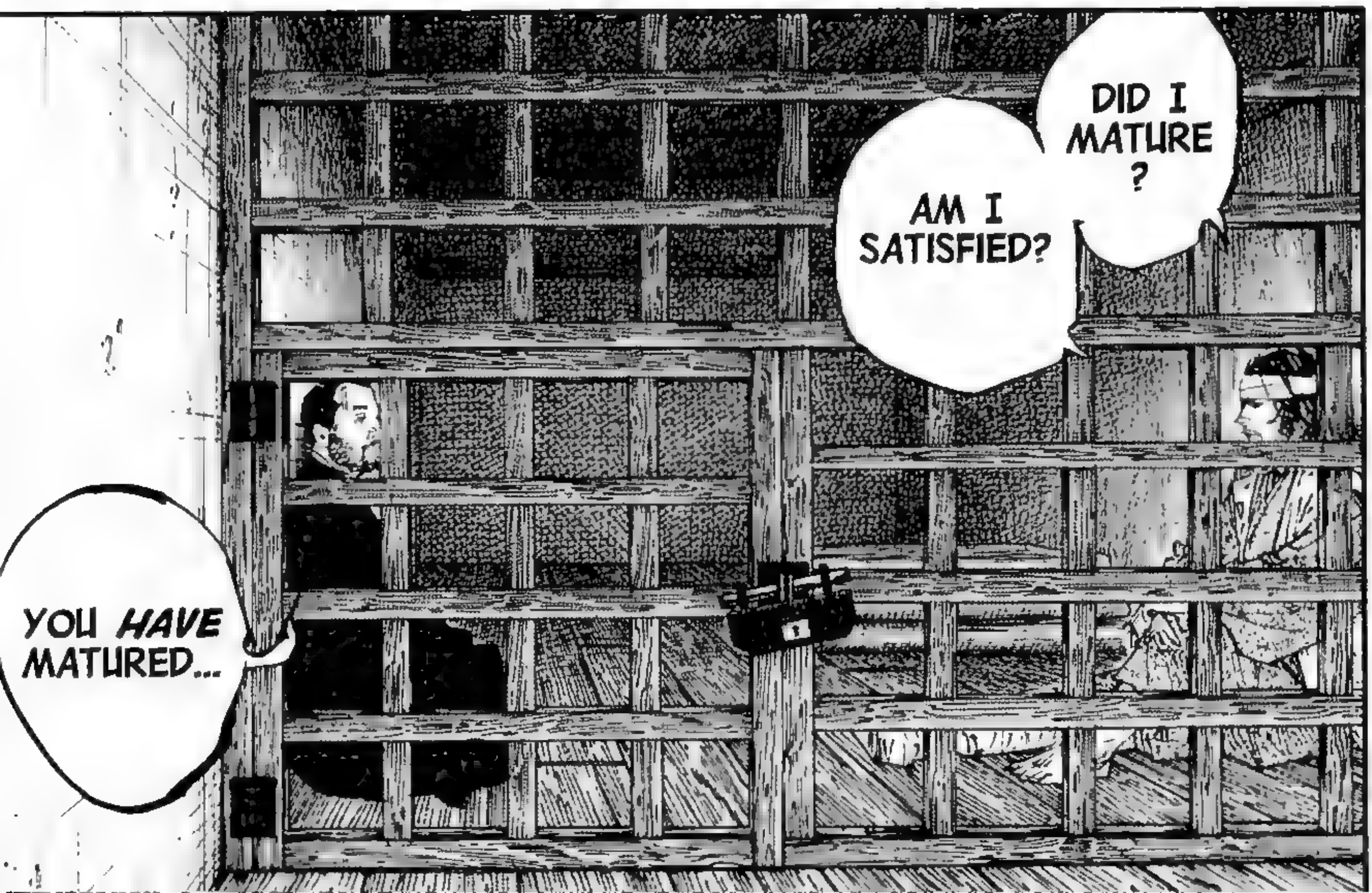
MY SELF...

WHO'S STRONGER, YOU OR ME?

BUT I HAVE THE AWARENESS ...

TO DISTANCE MYSELF FROM IT.

I CAN REMAIN CALM.



YES INDEED...

A SHARP SWORD...

A SWORD NEEDS A SHEATH.

CLUMSY...

HRMPH

IF YOU DON'T HAVE A PLACE TO PUT IT AWAY, THEN ONE DAY FOR SURE...

...TURNS EVERYONE INTO AN ENEMY.

...THAT IS ALWAYS DRAWN...

...

...YOU'LL END UP HURTING YOURSELF.

OLD MAN YAGYŪ ONCE TOLD ME...

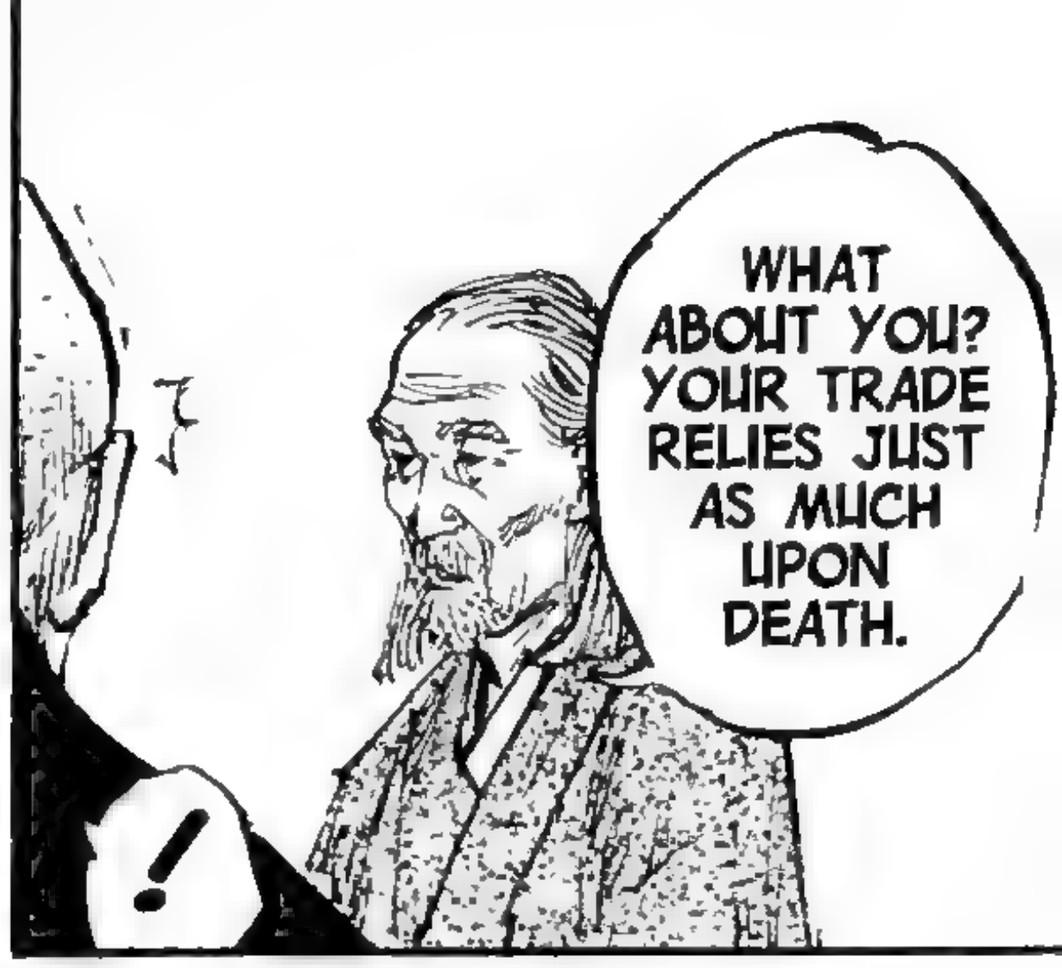
THE SWORD IS MEANT TO HARM PEOPLE.

IT'S AN INSTRUMENT OF DEATH.

WHY DEDICATE YOUR LIFE TO SUCH A HEINOUS OBJECT?

WHAT VALUE IS THERE IN THAT?

ONCE THE WAY HAS BEEN PERFECTED.



THAT'S WHAT MY MASTER TAUGHT ME.

WE DESPERATELY WIELD OUR SWORDS...
...TAKING US TO THE BRINK OF DEATH--ALL IN ORDER TO LEARN TO KEEP THEM SHEATHED.
MUSASHI...

PERHAPS YOU'VE FINALLY REACHED THAT POINT IN THE WAY.

GET MARRIED AND SETTLE DOWN.

DEVOTE YOURSELF IN SERVICE AS A SAMURAI.

BECOME A MAN.

YOU DON'T NEED YOUR LEGS FOR THAT.

CREATE A HOME FOR YOURSELF TO RETURN TO.

KOJIRŌ!

BREASTS?

ARE PLAYING WITH SWORDS AND GIRLS' BREASTS THE ONLY THINGS THAT INTEREST YOU?

HEY! WHERE ARE YOU GOING!

TUP TUP

YOU RASCAL!

DON'T GIVE ME THAT!

YOU DESERVE A GOOD SPANKING!

SMIRK

AUH--

WOMEN AND THE SWORD...

HIS EARS CANNOT HEAR, HIS MOUTH CAN UTTER NO WORDS.

OH DEAR...

AS IF HE'S AN ANIMAL WHO CAN'T CONTROL HIMSELF.

...WOMEN...

...AND THE SWORD.

ALL THAT WE DO OUR UTMOST TO HIDE, HE DISPLAYS OUT IN THE OPEN FOR EVERYONE TO SEE.

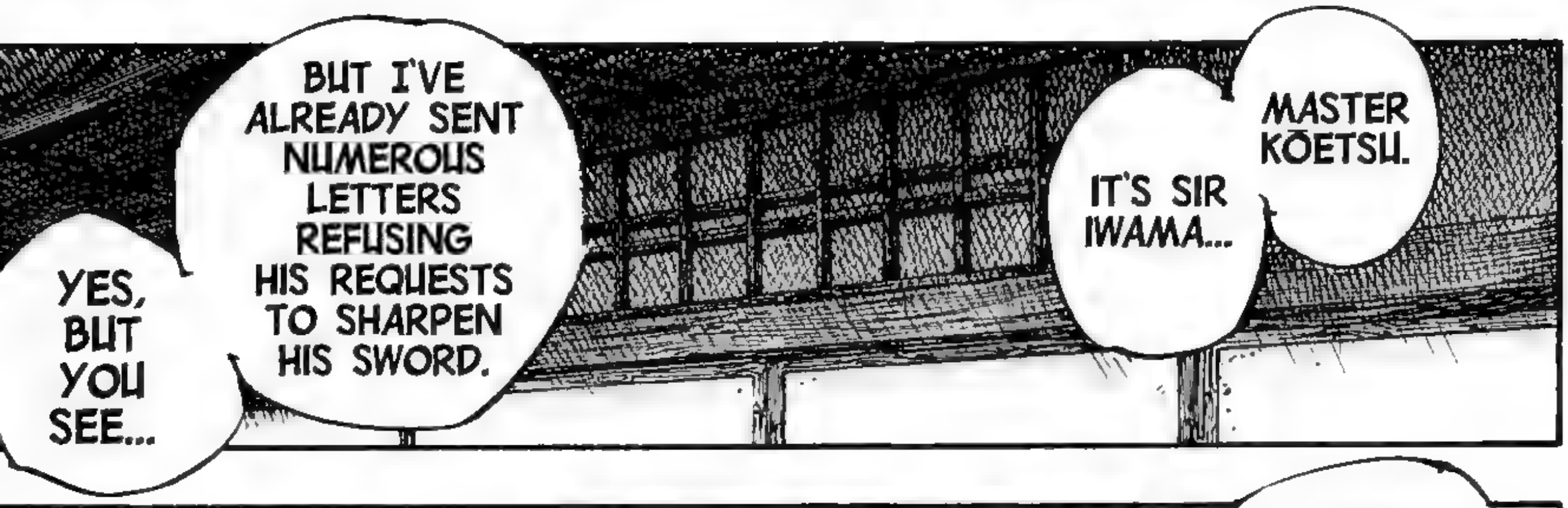
HIS ONLY TRUE METHODS OF COMMUNICATION ARE WITH...

I JUST DON'T WANT TO BEAR WITNESS TO AN UNFORTUNATE FUTURE.

...
IT'S NOT LIKE YOU TO BE SO EMOTIONAL, MOTHER...

I WORRY ABOUT HIM...

IT'S TRUE. AS IF HE'S A SWORD UNBARED.
HE NEEDS A PROPER SHEATH.


YES, BUT YOU SEE...
BUT I'VE ALREADY SENT NUMEROUS LETTERS REFUSING HIS REQUESTS TO SHARPEN HIS SWORD.
IT'S SIR IWAMA...
MASTER KŌETSU.

WHAT?
HE'S HERE IN PERSON, SIR. ALL THE WAY FROM KOKURA.

I HAVE COME TO KYOTO IN PERSON TO HAVE MY SWORD SHARPENED, SIR KŌETSU.

CHIEF RETAINER IWAMA KAKUBE OF THE KOKURA HOSOKAWA CLAN.

IS THERE A PROBLEM? WHY WOULDN'T THE ESTEEMED HON'AMI KŌETSU WANT TO WORK ON THIS FINE BLADE?

THIS IS A SPLENDID *KIKU-ICHIMONJI* SWORD!

IT'S TRUE I AM NO MASTER SWORDSMAN!

I'M JUST A COL-LECTOR.

THERE'S NO PROBLEM WITH THE SWORD, BUT THE OWNER'S SKILL LEAVES SOMETHING TO BE DESIRED!

NO!

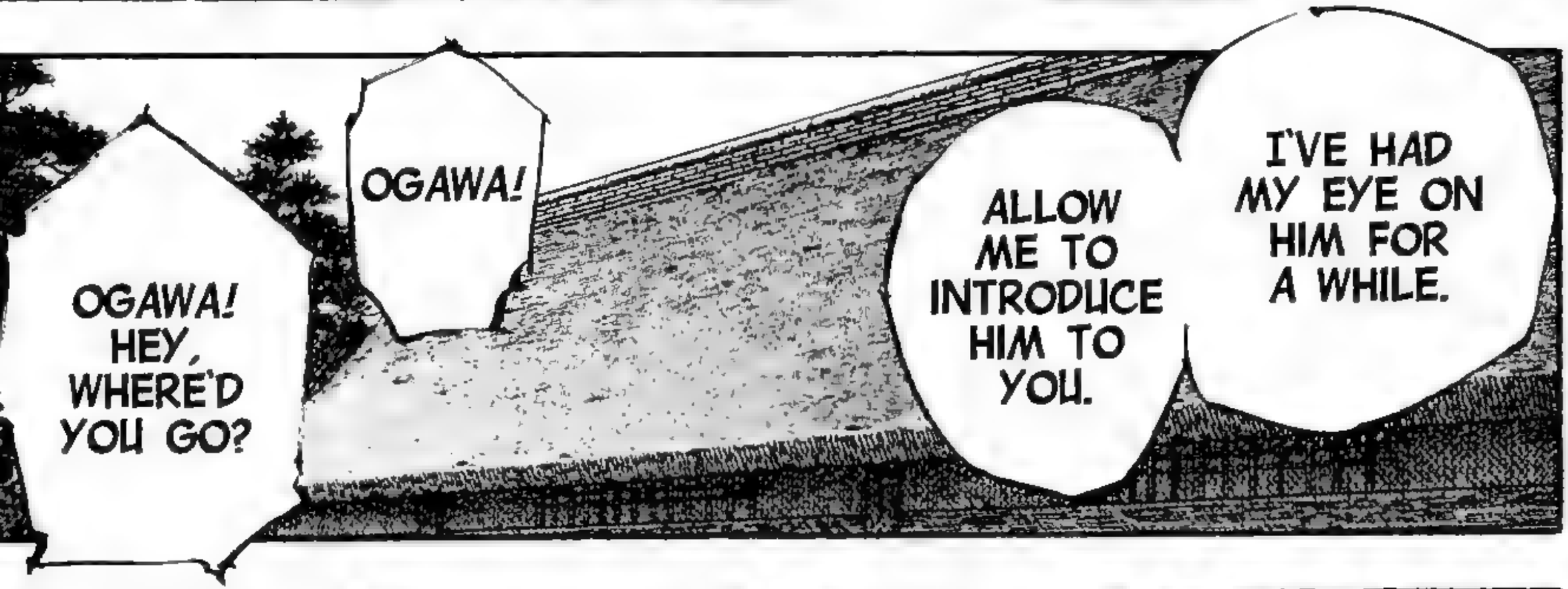
I KNOW THE TRUE REASON!

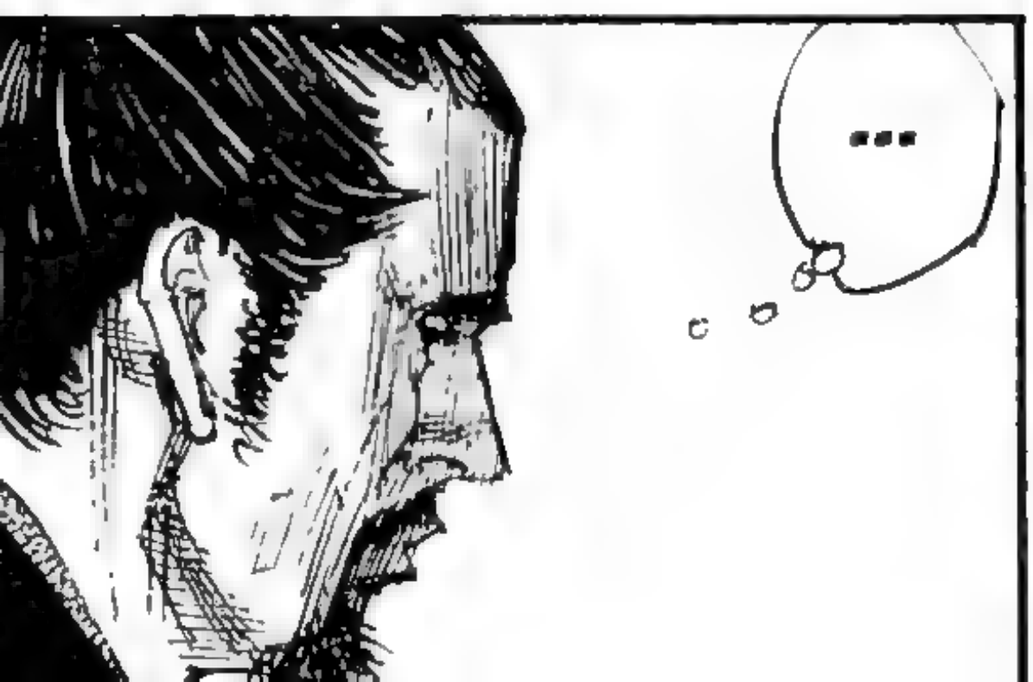
OH, THERE IS NO PROBLEM HERE.

IT'S JUST THAT I'M RETIRED ...

BUT I REALLY AM RETIRED ...

I'LL BE HANDING THIS SWORD DOWN TO AN INCREDIBLE SWORDSMAN...
DON'T YOU WORRY. YOU SEE, VERY SOON...

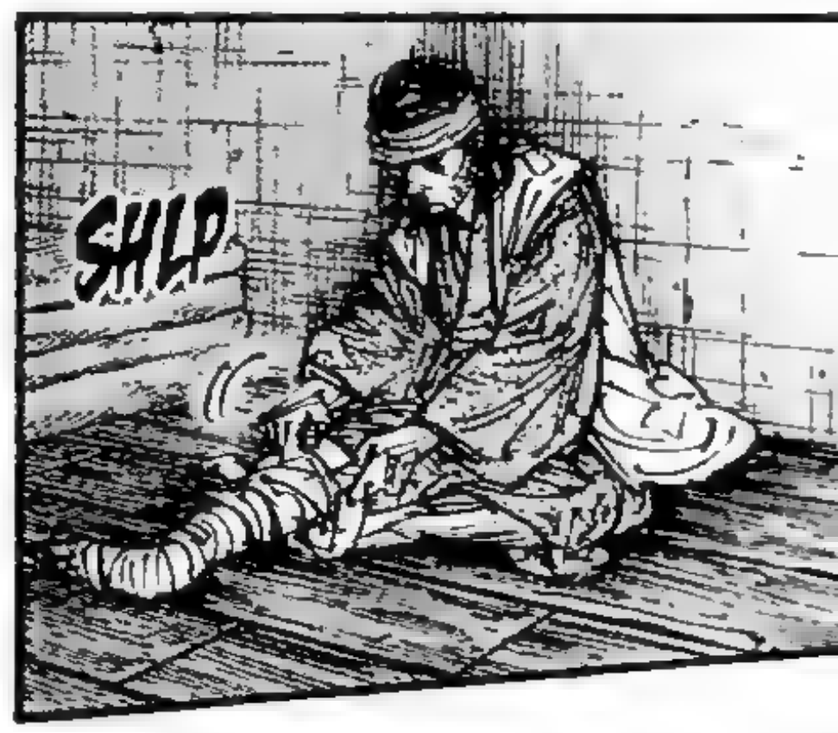

OGAWA! HEY, WHERE'D YOU GO?
OGAWA!
ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE HIM TO YOU.
I'VE HAD MY EYE ON HIM FOR A WHILE.

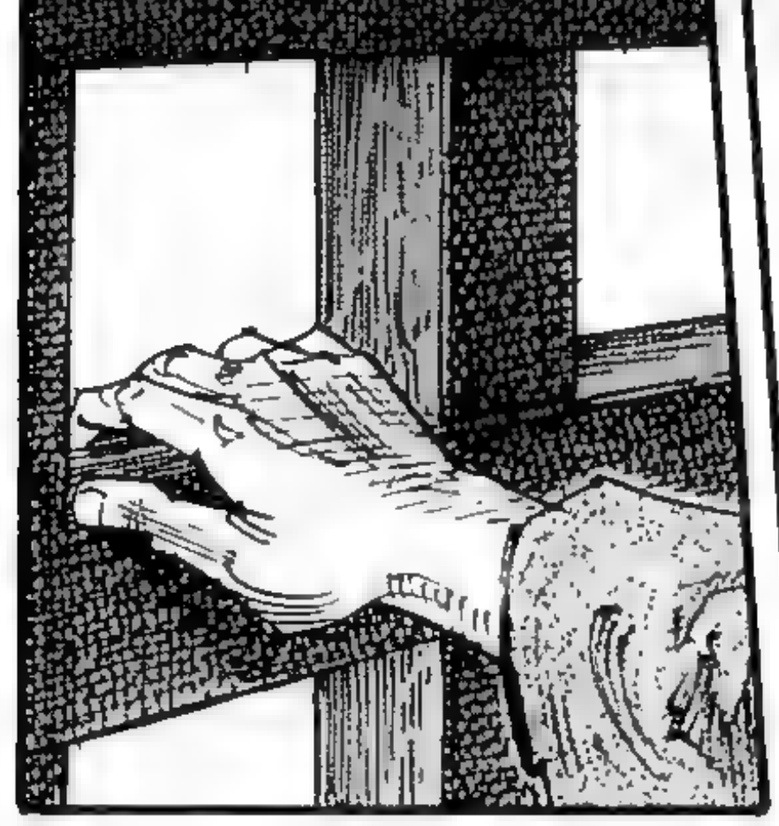

...

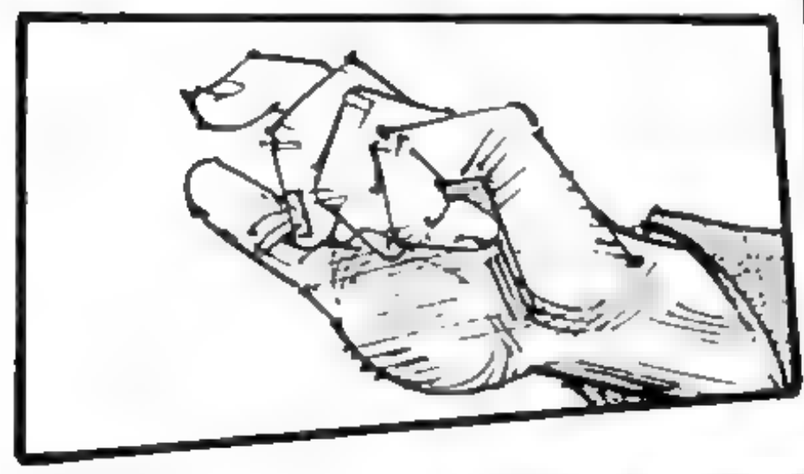
YOU COULD SAY HE'S A MARTIAL ARTS OTAKU.
HE'S CRAZY ABOUT SWORDS.
武道オタクといわれる
刀剣マニアである

#255 | Question

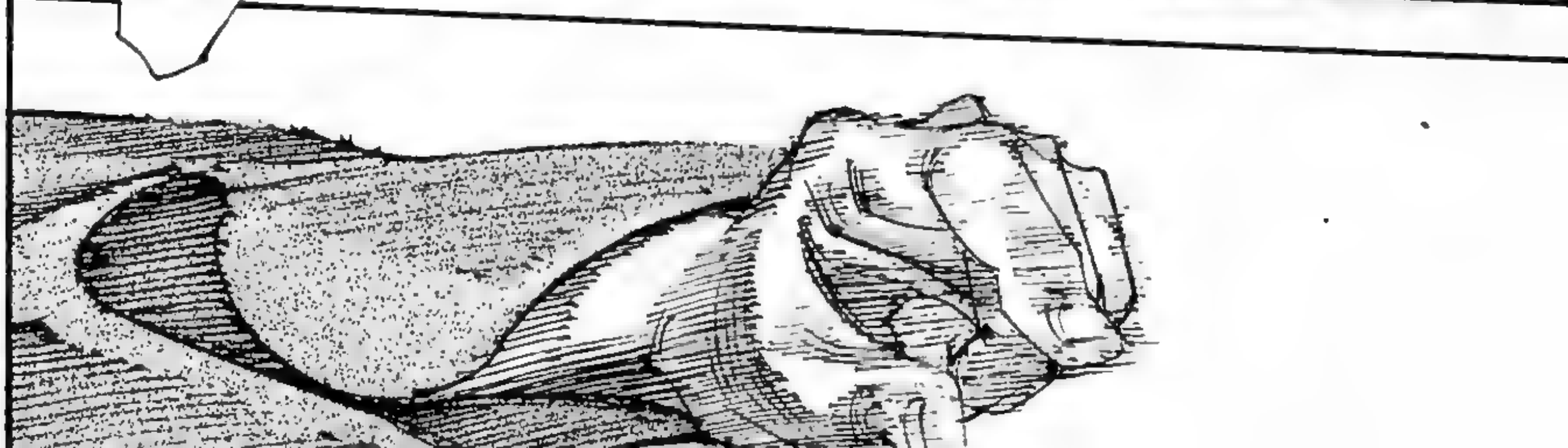
CREATE A PLACE YOU CAN GO HOME TO, MUSASHI.







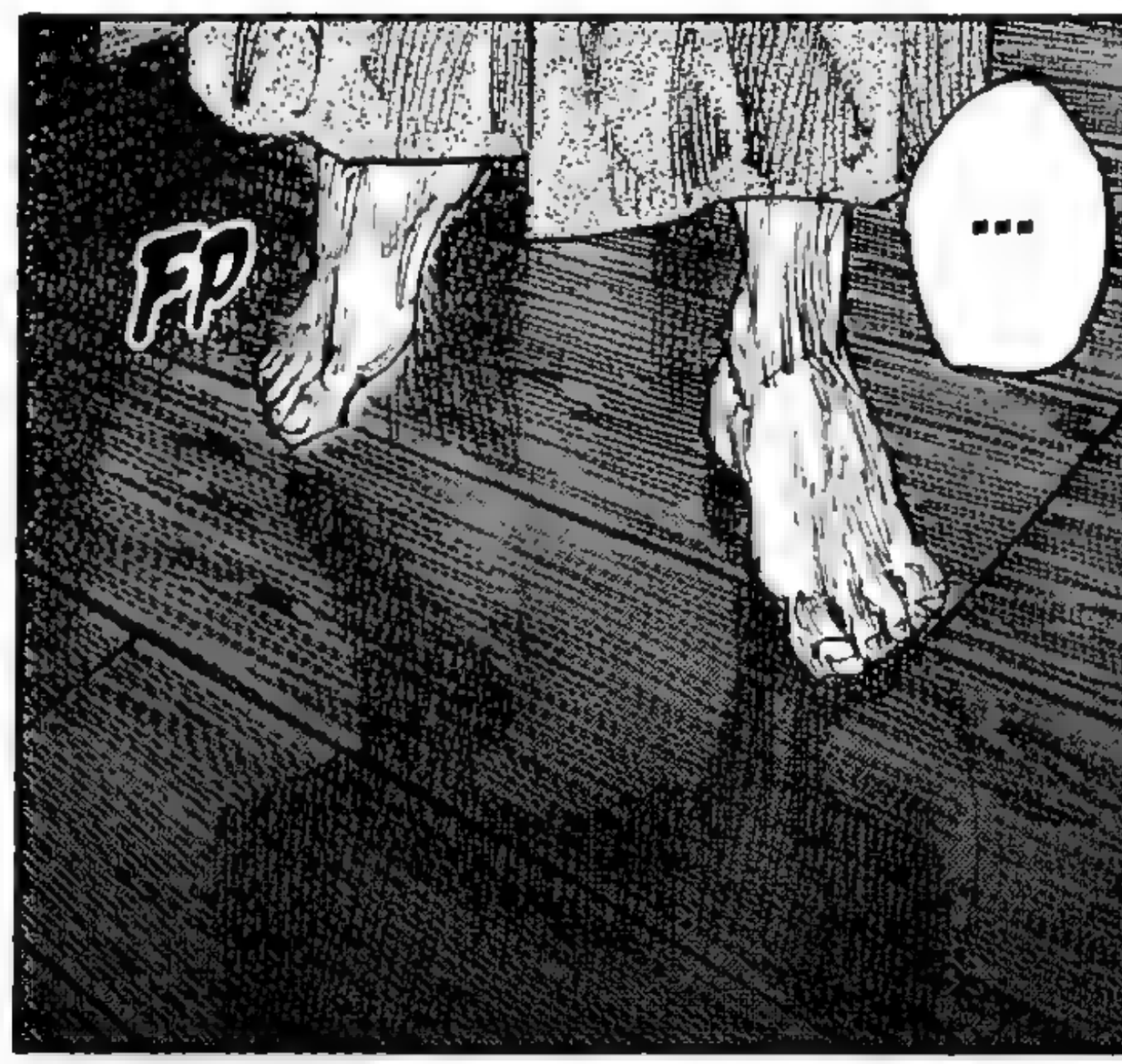
UMF
HMF



HUF

...

TP


FP
...

AARGHH!

YOU SEE.

I CAN'T FEEL THE PAIN WITH THESE TIGHT BANDAGES.

URGH

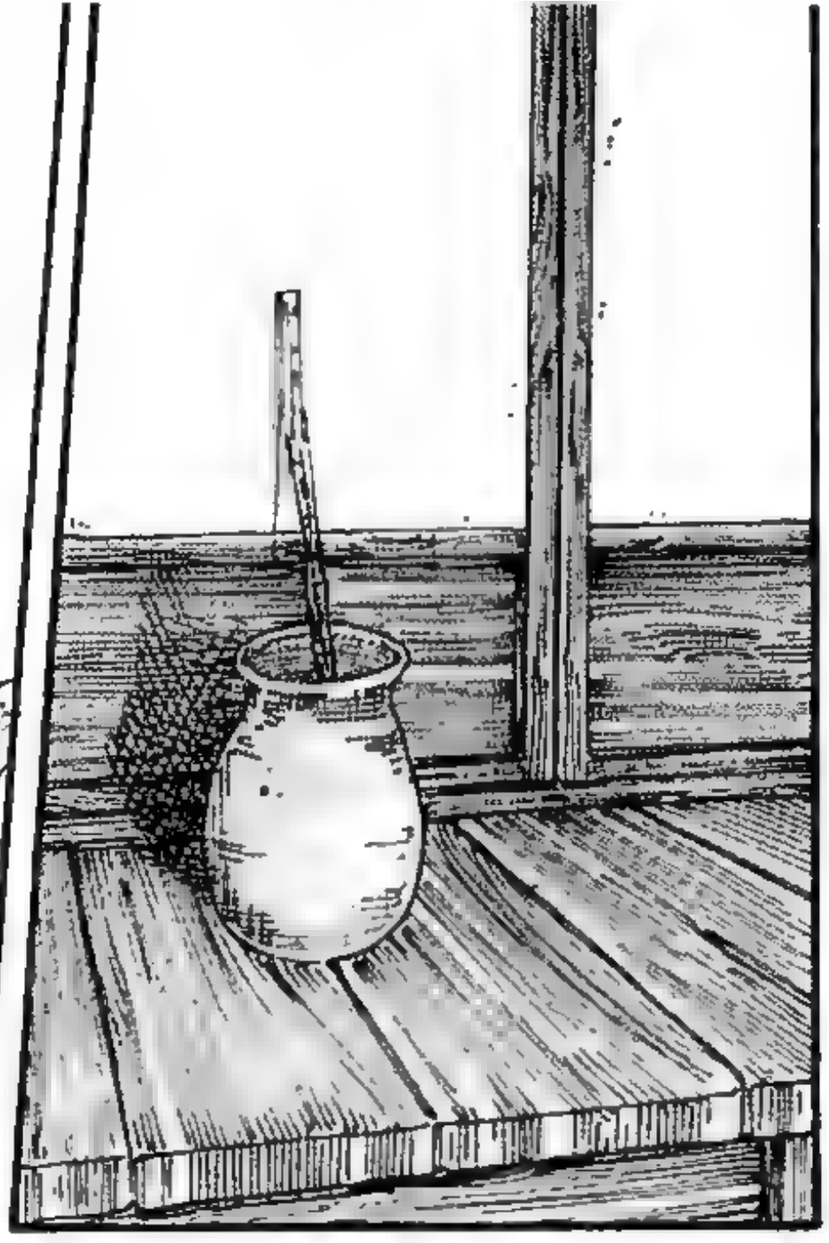
OUCH

IT'S NO GOOD.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

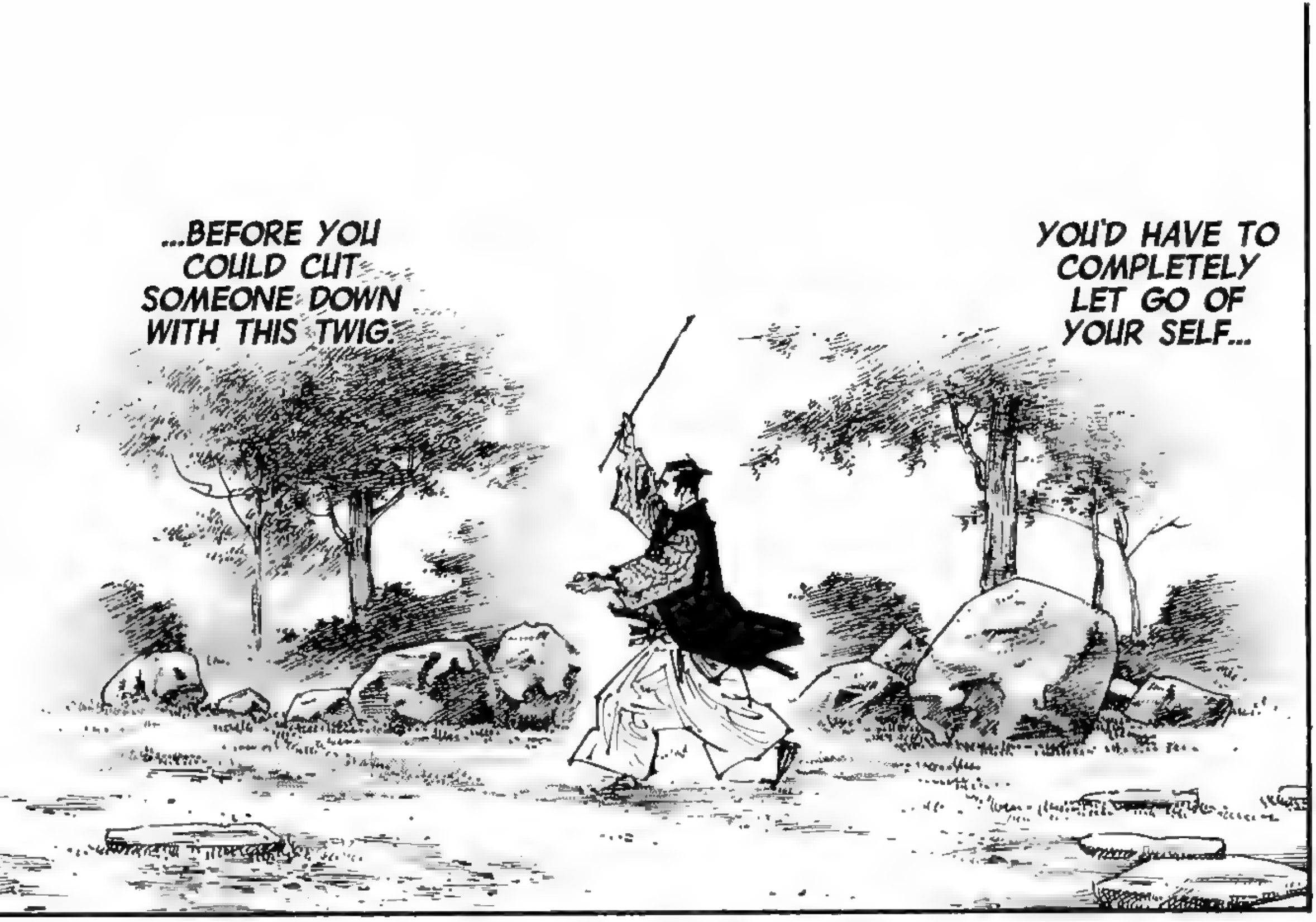
GUARD? EXCUSE ME...

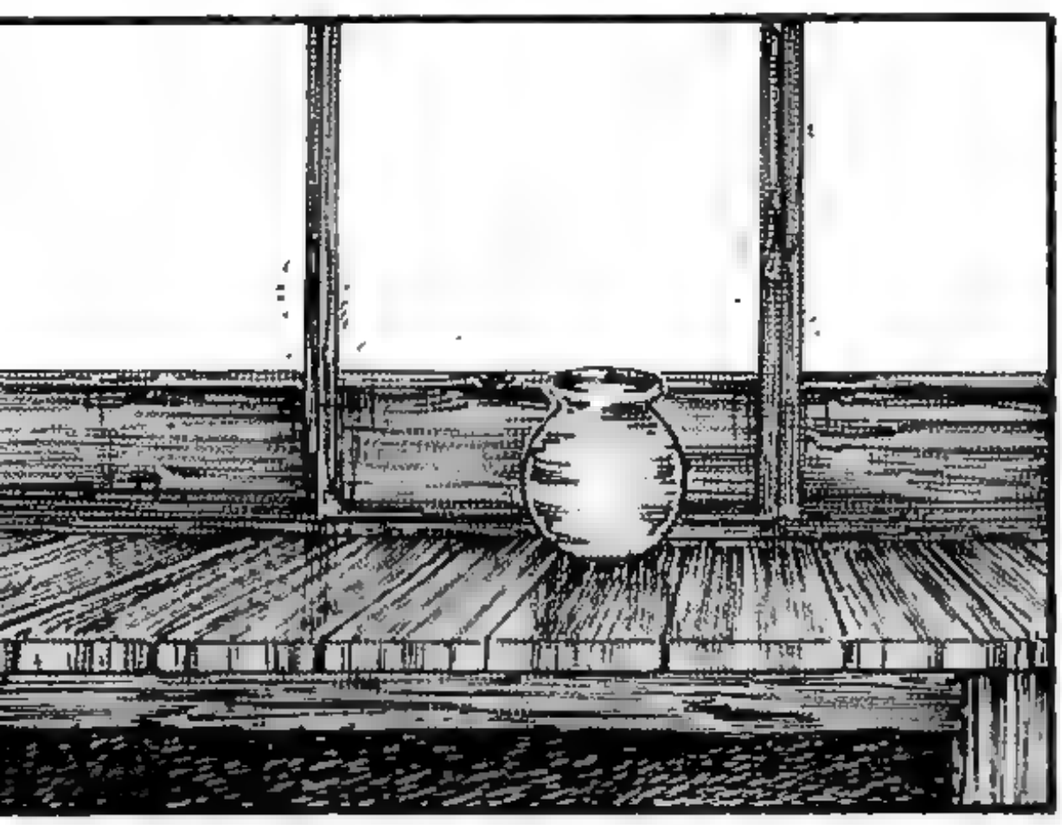
IT'S MY BODY.



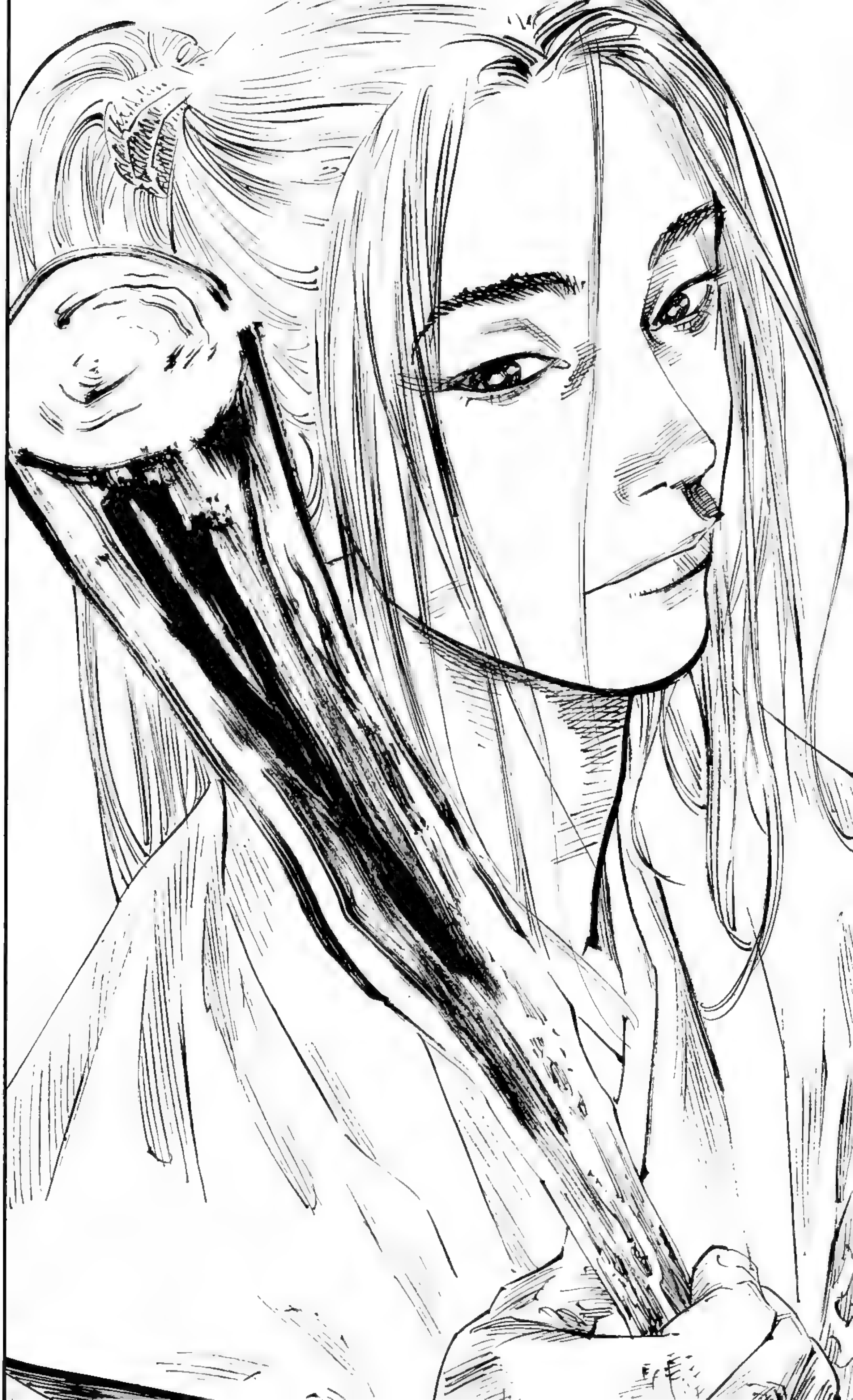
FWIP

THIS WOULD MAKE FOR GOOD PRACTICE.
I SEE...


...BEFORE YOU COULD CUT SOMEONE DOWN WITH THIS TWIG.
YOU'D HAVE TO COMPLETELY LET GO OF YOUR SELF...



BUT WHO IN THE WORLD WOULD--



TWP
WAIT!
NGH!
THWAK
SO YOU'RE THE ONE WHO TRAINS WITH THESE TWIGS.
WHAT IS YOUR NAME?
!!

THWAP

SMIRK
AUH...
HMM?
HUF
HUF
...?
!!

DON'T RUSH THINGS.

SHOULD YOU BE TAKING THAT OFF?

IT'S OKAY.

YOU'RE COVERED WITH WOUNDS...

LOOK AT YOU.

...

DON'T YOU THINK THERE MIGHT BE SOMETHING WRONG...

...WITH KILLING 70 MEN?

...

THAT PERHAPS YOU STRAYED FROM THE WAY?

...

NOT ANOTHER SERMON.

WHAT IS A PERSON'S LIFE?

HERE'S A QUESTION.

THOSE MEN ALL CHOSE TO LIVE BY THE SWORD.

THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH CUTTING THEM DOWN.

...

THAT WAS A BATTLE.

SOMEWHERE DEEP DOWN INSIDE YOU MUST HAVE DOUBTS ABOUT WHETHER IT'S RIGHT TO TAKE SOMEONE'S LIFE.

IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO YOU KILLED...

I WON...
DIDN'T I...?

DIDN'T I...?

GULP

I FEEL IT EVEN NOW.

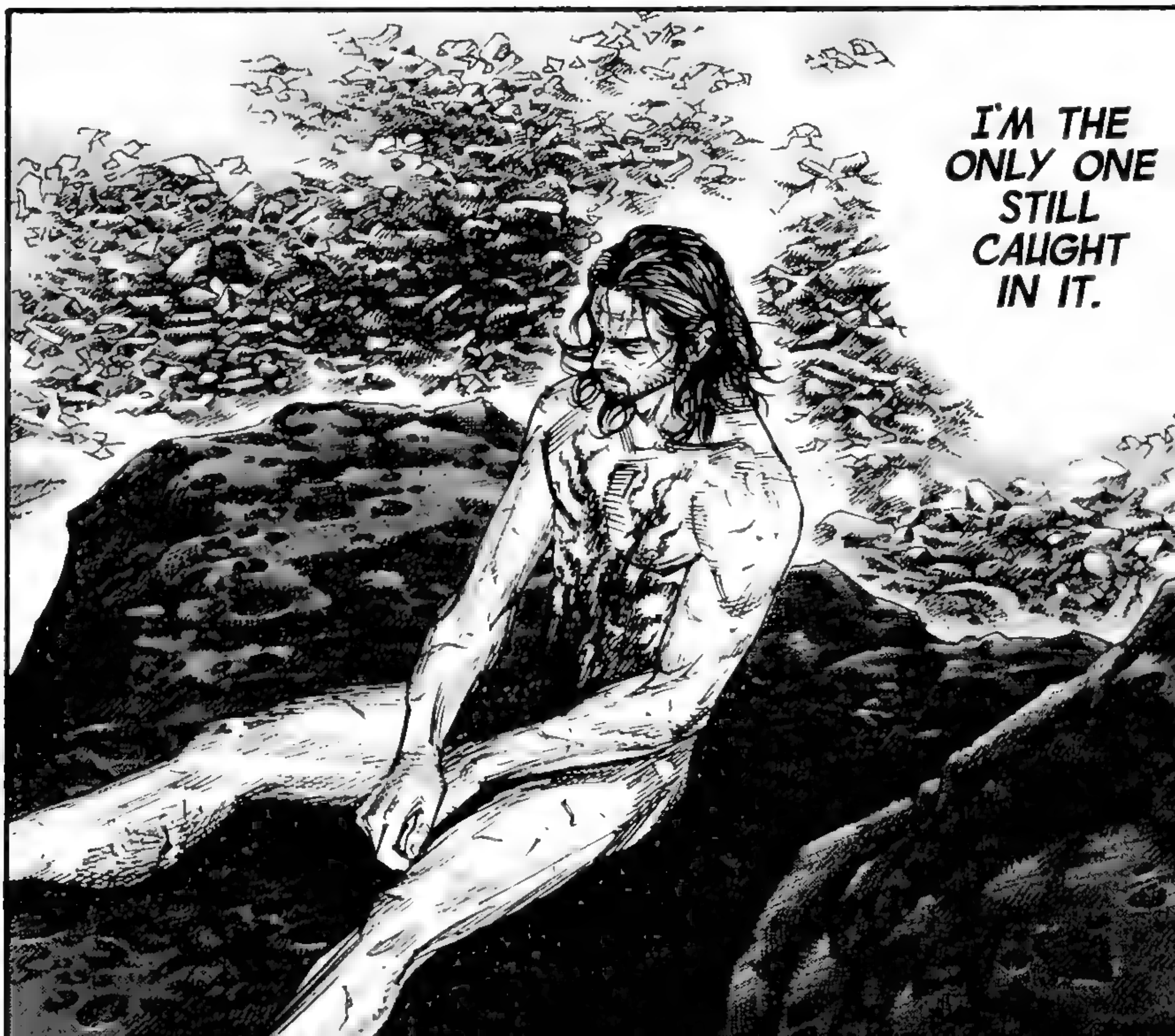
I'VE LIVED MY LIFE ALWAYS BEARING THIS BURDEN.

I FEEL A HEAVINESS IN MY STOMACH... LIKE LEAD.

THAT'S RIGHT.

AS IF THE FIGHTING STILL CONTINUES.

THE OTHERS HAVE BEEN RELEASED.



WHO REALLY WON?

THERE ARE NO WINNERS.

ISN'T THAT RIGHT?

I DON'T KNOW ANYMORE.

DEEP INSIDE YOU DO.

THAT WEIGHT YOU FEEL INSIDE IS THE PROOF.

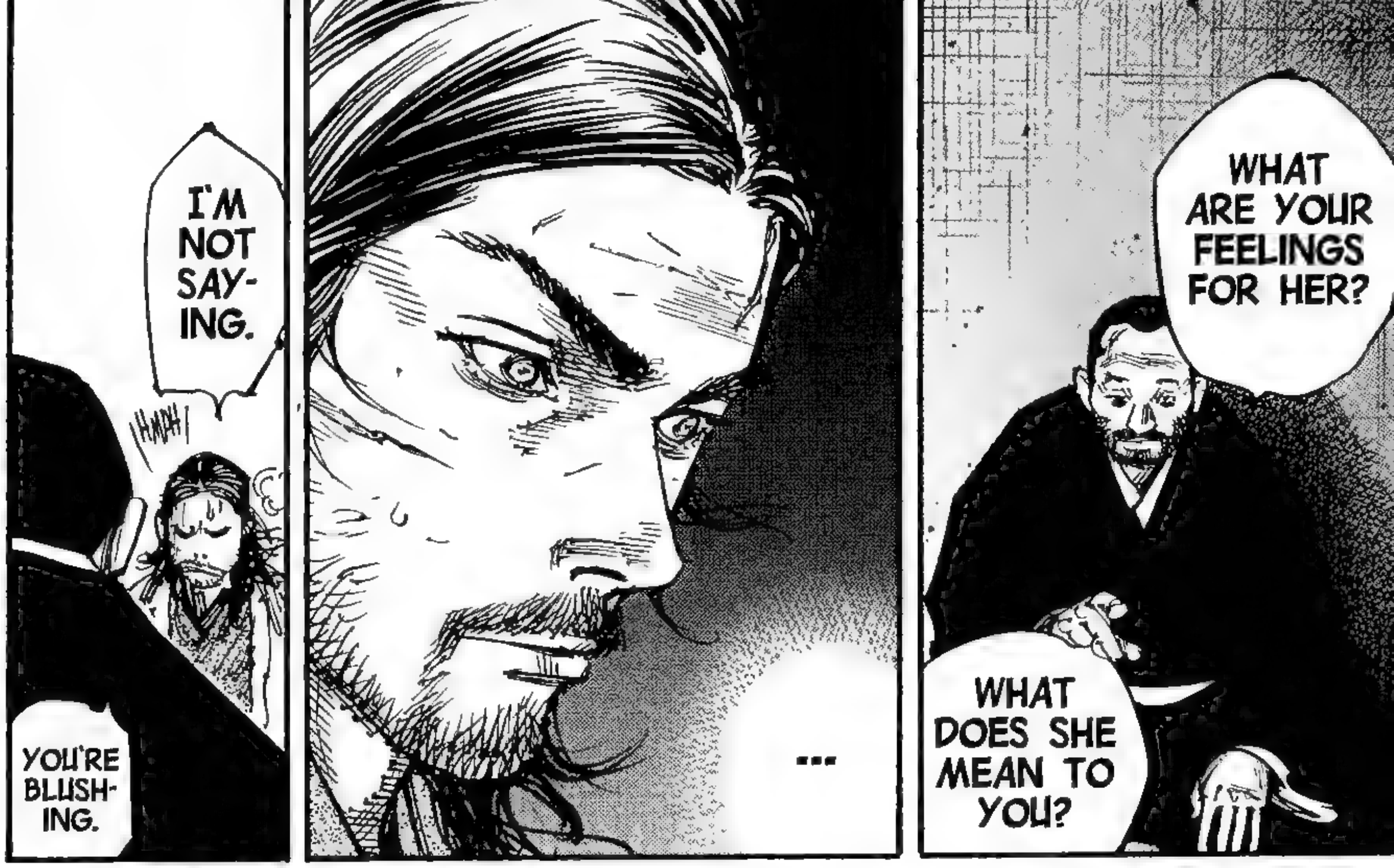
#256 | A Voice

I'LL PARTAKE IN THE SAME.
YOU'RE EATING HERE?
SIR...
...IT'S DINNER TIME.
AH...

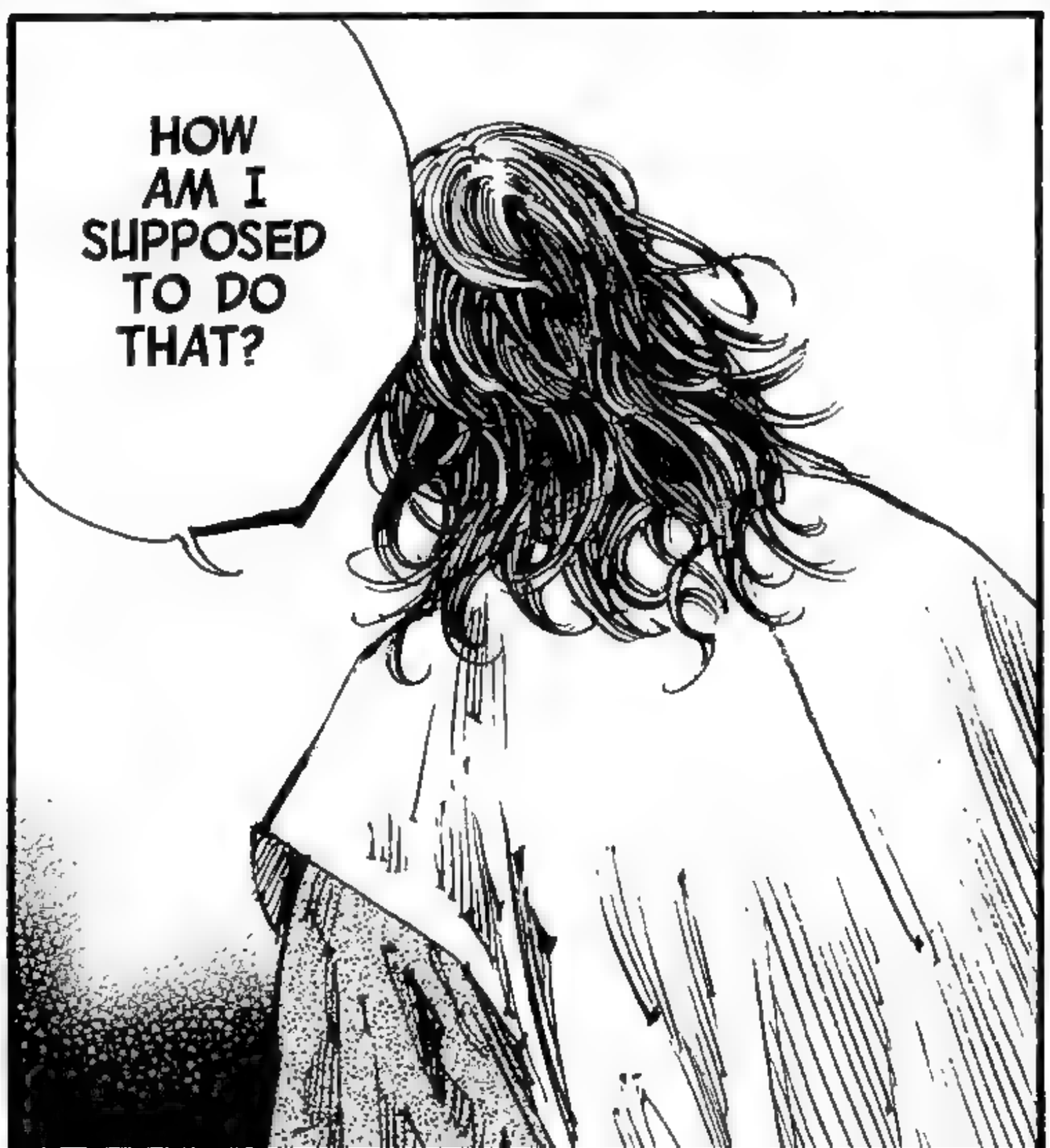
YOU MUST HAVE TRIED SOMETHING BEFORE.
I HEAR IT'S GOOD TO BE A LITTLE AGGRESSIVE.
...YOU GRABBED HER LEG LIKE THIS.
PERHAPS ...

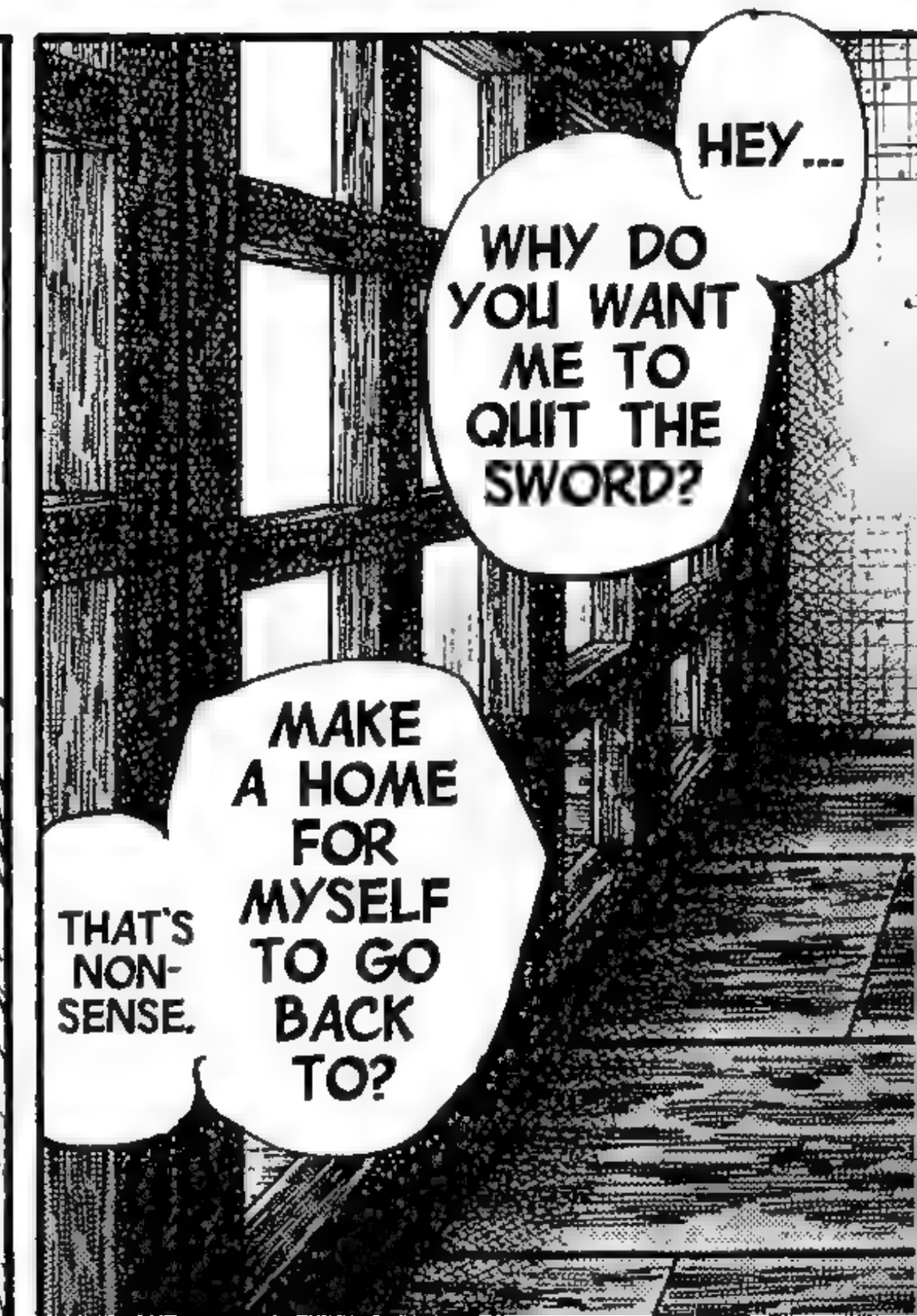
FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE! BE WITH HER!
TALK TO OTSU!
WHAT ?!

SLURP
TP


I'M NOT SAY-ING.
HMPH!
YOU'RE BLUSH-ING.
...
WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS FOR HER?
WHAT DOES SHE MEAN TO YOU?

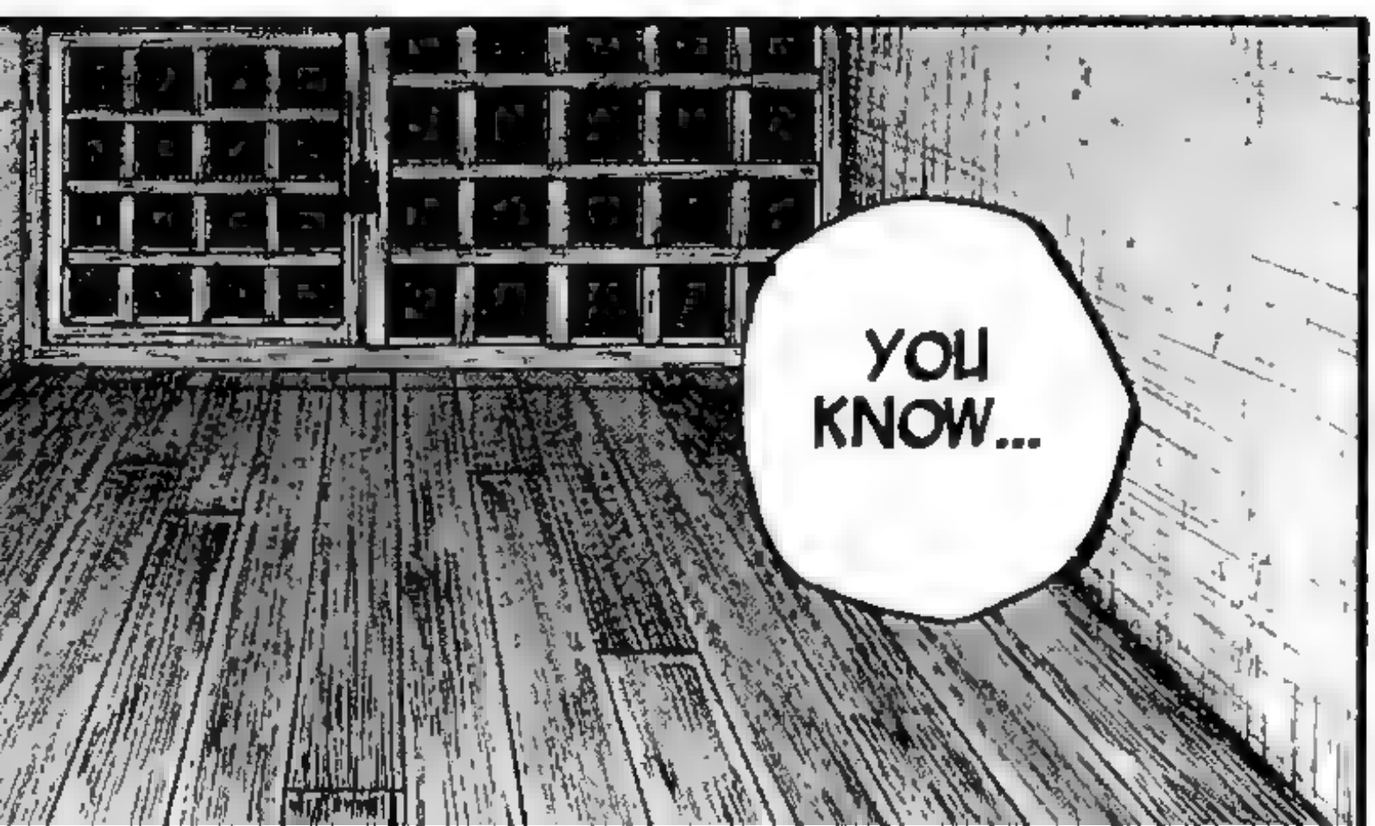
MAKE A HOME FOR YOURSELF TO RETURN TO.


HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO DO THAT?


HEY...
WHY DO YOU WANT ME TO QUIT THE SWORD?
MAKE A HOME FOR MYSELF TO GO BACK TO?
THAT'S NON-SENSE.

HOW DO I RETURN TO A PLACE THAT DOESN'T EXIST YET?

TELL ME THAT, EH?



IS THERE HOPE FOR US?
WHY WERE WE BORN?
I DON'T KNOW.
HOW SHOULD WE LIVE?
IN THIS DARK CHAOS...
TO BE HONEST...
THERE'S SO MUCH THAT I DON'T REALLY UNDER-STAND.
PARTICU-LARLY WHEN I SEE MEN TRYING TO CUT EACH OTHER DOWN.
HMPH ...
WHAT ARE WE?

...AND STRUGGLE...

...WE SUFFER.

...AND MAKE MISTAKES.

I TOO SUFFER FROM BEING SELF-CENTERED.

AND DURING THE TIMES I FEEL PARTICULARLY SO, THE PATH I'VE TREAD THUS FAR SEEMS UTTERLY IN VAIN.

YOU?

OF COURSE.

...!!

MUSASHI ...

YOU IDIOT.
IT ALL SEEMS SO FUTILE.
WHAT'S THE POINT ?
PTU!

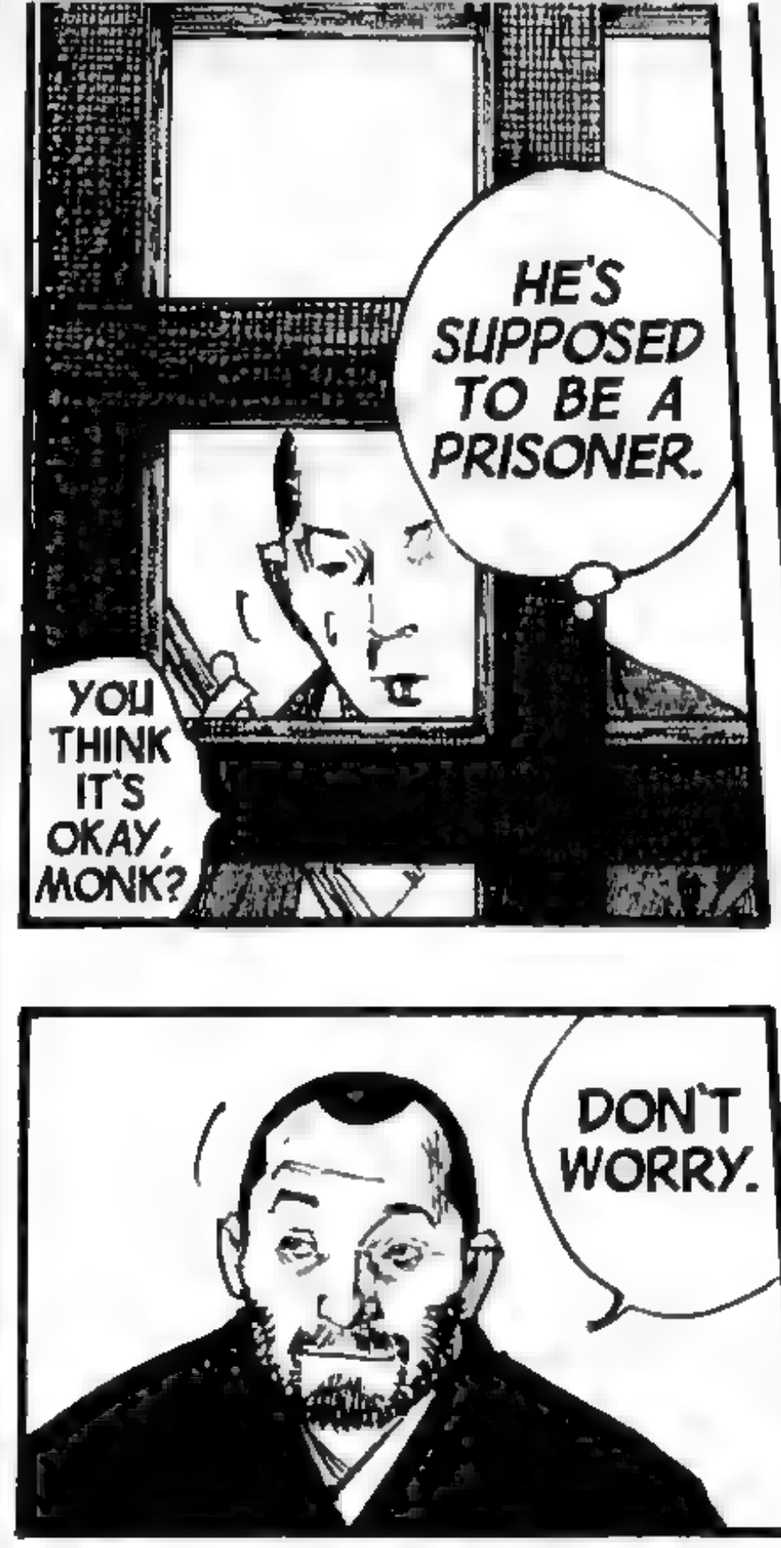
IF YOU SURVIVED THOSE 70 MEN AT ICHIJŌJI...
...THERE WAS SOMETHING I WAS PLANNING ON TELLING YOU.

THE TRUTH IS...

LISTEN...

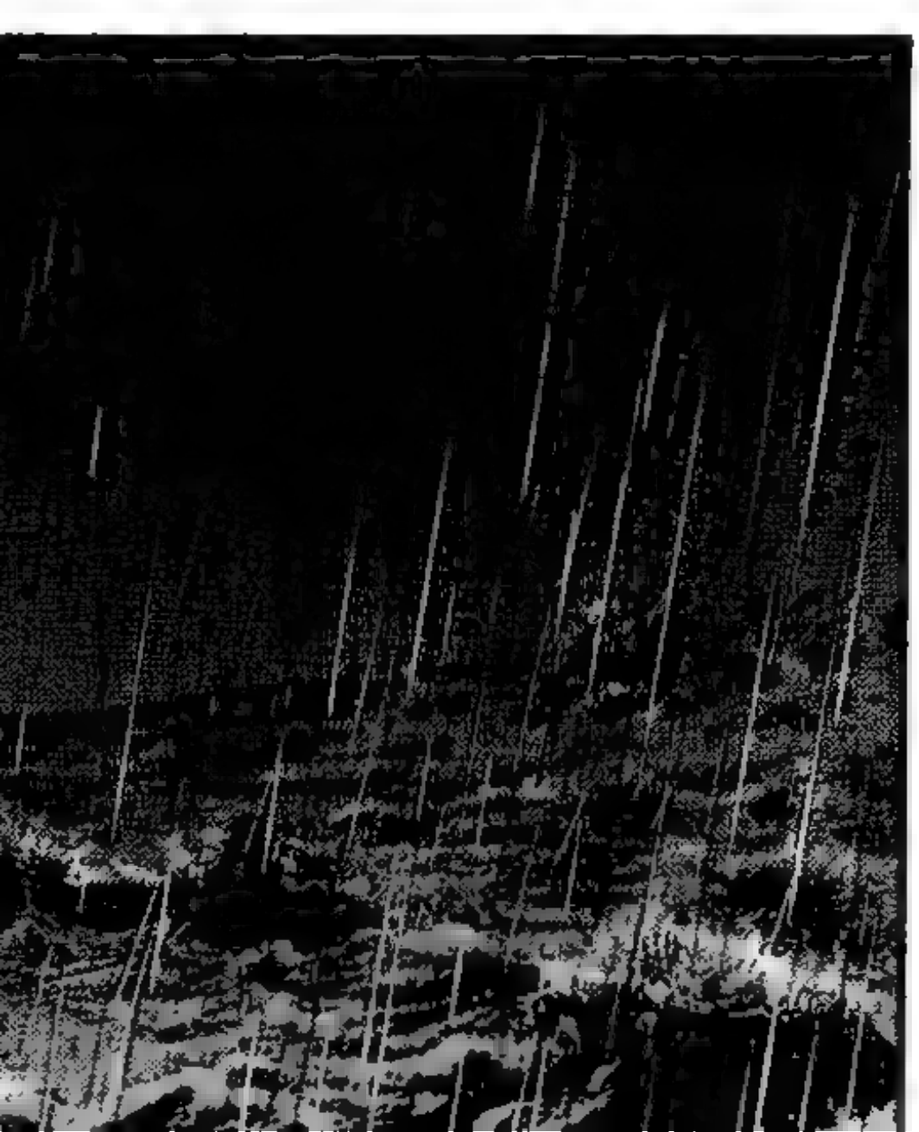
I RECENTLY HEARD A VOICE.

...


HE'S SUPPOSED TO BE A PRISONER.
YOU THINK IT'S OKAY, MONK?
DON'T WORRY.

WILL THIS DO?
YES, THAT'S FINE. THANKS.

WHOSE VOICE WAS IT?
WHAT DID YOU HEAR?



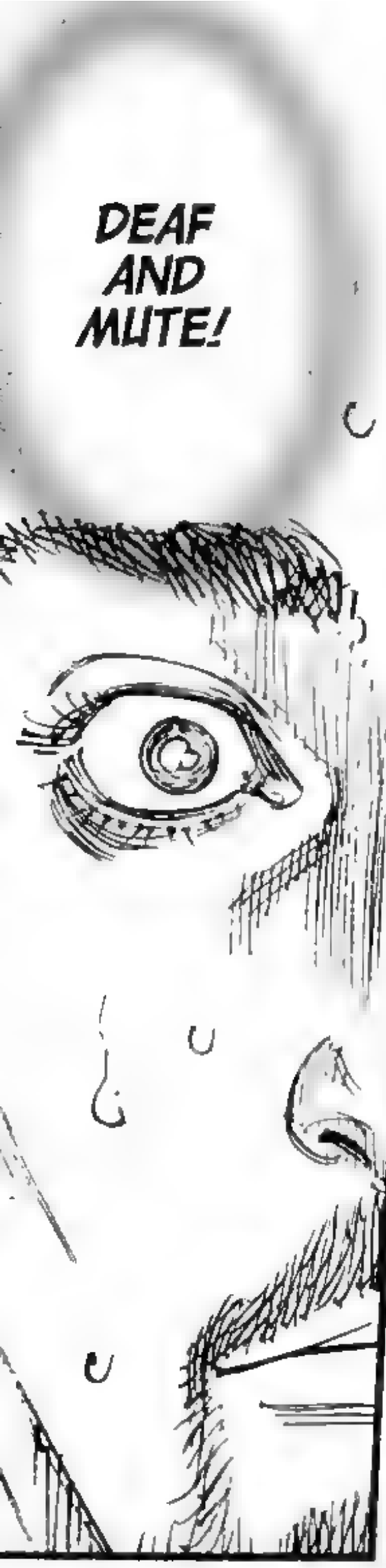
BOTH OUR PASTS AND OUR FUTURES...

ACCORDING TO THIS VOICE...

...OUR PATHS...

...THAT'S THE REASON THAT WE ARE SO COMPLETELY FREE.

WHAT POWER!
HIS ENTIRE WEIGHT FOCUSED ON THE POINT OF THAT TWIG.


DEAF AND MUTE!

SMIRK

YOUR NAME?
AHH--
WHO IS HE?

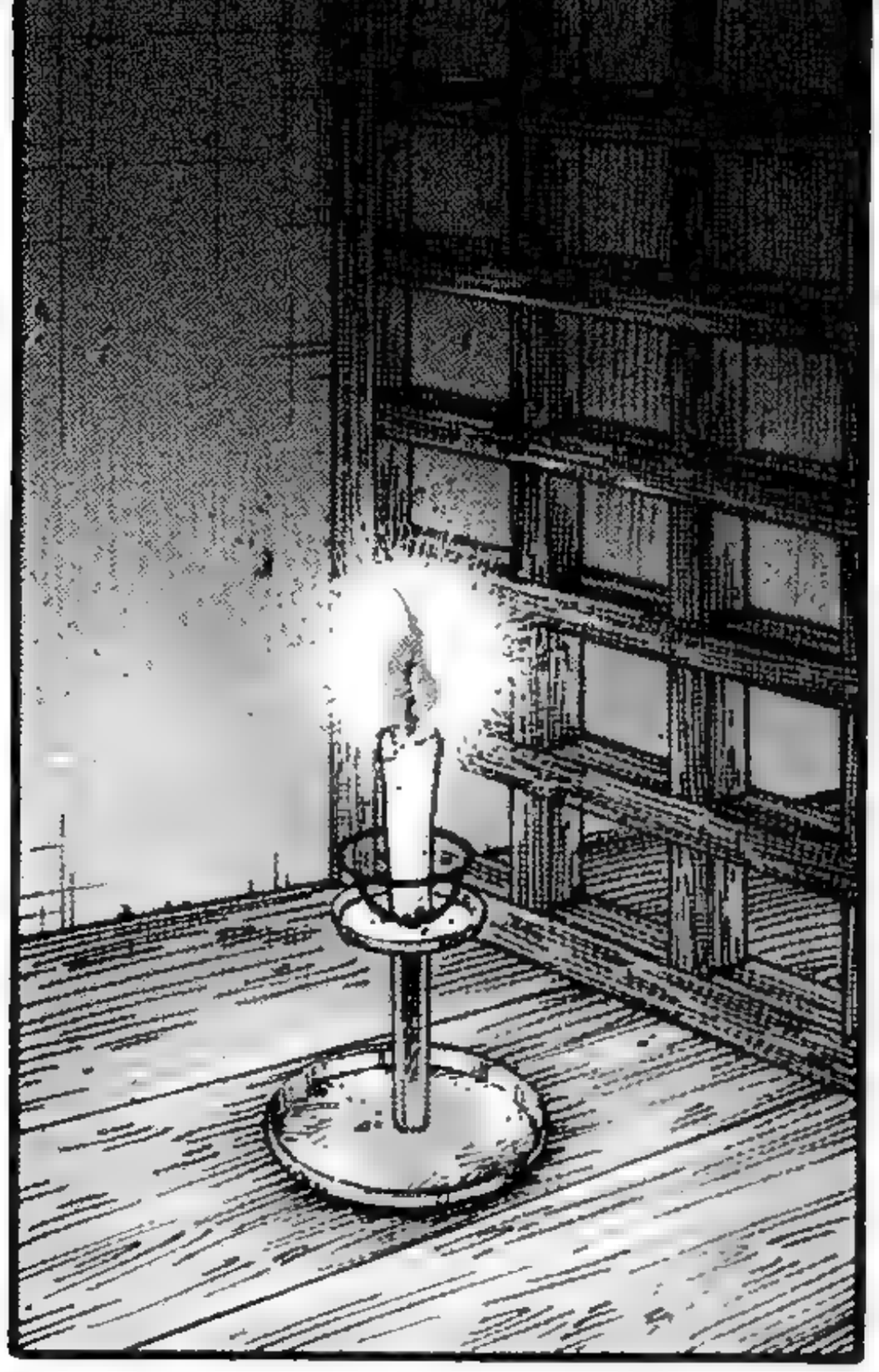
...
WHAT IS YOUR NAME?

...AND I'M PRESENTED WITH THE OPPORTUNITY OF A LIFETIME.
MY FIRST VISIT TO KYOTO ACCOMPANYING MY LORD...
PRESUMP-TIONS CAN BE SO WRONG...

...I ASSUMED THE DEAF MUTE SWORDSMAN STAYING HERE WOULD BE A DECREPIT OLD MAN.
BUT IT TURNS OUT TO BE YOU, SASAKI KOJIRŌ!

WHP
...
SWISH

#257 | Contradiction



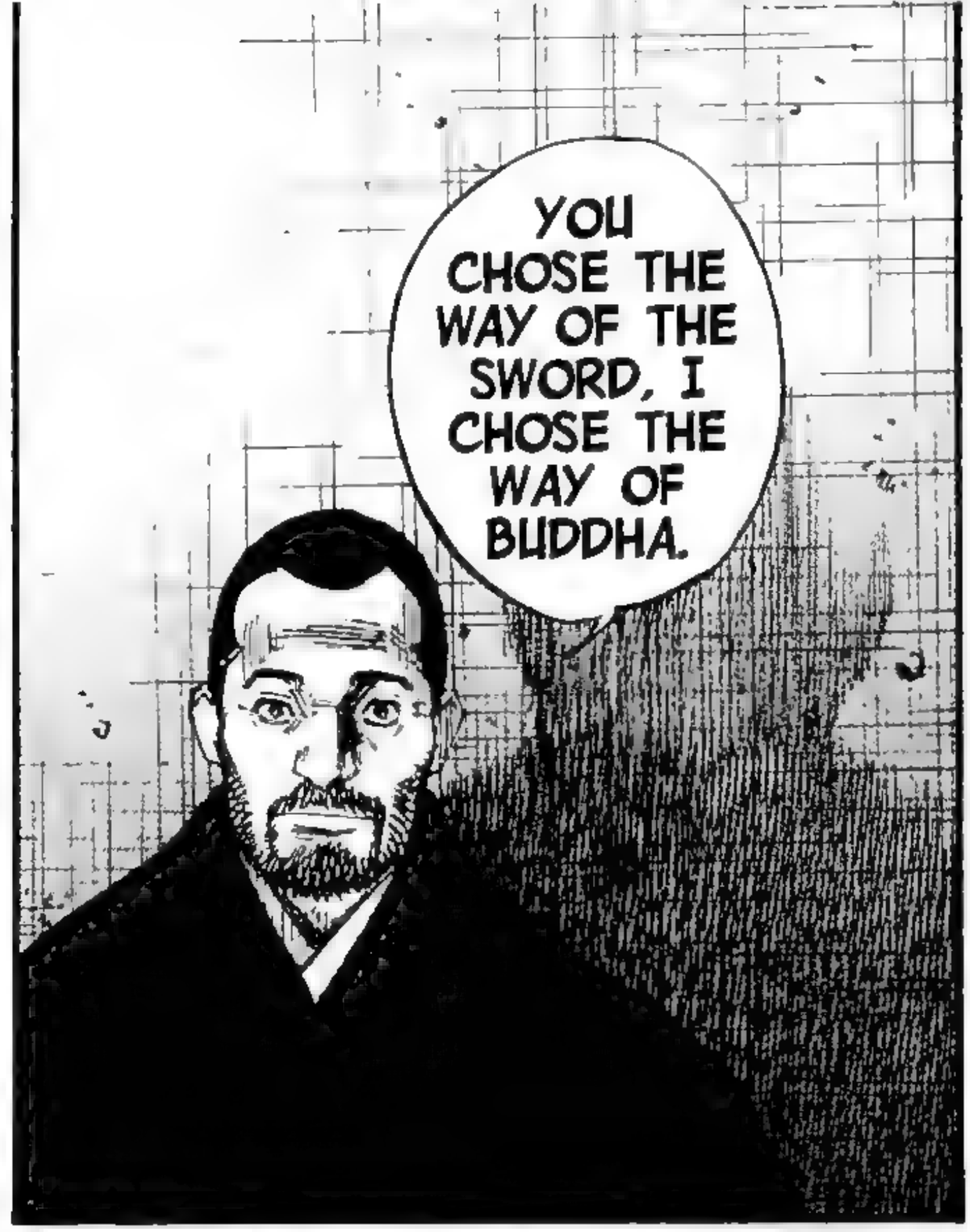
...AND YET COMPLETELY FREE?
PRE-ORDAINED...

WHERE DO I START?

BUT THAT'S NOT HOW THINGS TRULY ARE!

THEY'RE COM-PLETELY OPPOSITE.
THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE.
A CONTRA-DICTION.
I KNOW.

THE PATH OF THE BUDDHA...
...IS THE PATH OF THE PEOPLE.


YOU CHOSE THE WAY OF THE SWORD, I CHOSE THE WAY OF BUDDHA.

I UNDER-TOOK MY TRAVELS IN ORDER TO DISCOVER HUMAN NATURE...

IT WAS A JOURNEY TO SEE THINGS IN MAN THAT I NEVER WANTED TO SEE.

FICH

NNGH
...

SASAKI KOJIRŌ...

HOW CAN THAT TWIG HOLD SO MUCH FORCE BEHIND IT?

...OF A LIFETIME...
THE OPPOR-TUNITY...

HEY, OGAWA!
OGAWA!

THIS OGAWA IS THE BEST SWORDSMAN I'VE EVER COME ACROSS.

WONDER WHERE HE WENT.
BATH-ROOM, PERHAPS.

BETTER THAN THE KOKURA HOSOKAWA CLAN'S SWORD INSTRUCTOR? HE MUST BE FORMIDABLE ...
I BELIEVE HE EVEN SURPASSES OUR SWORD INSTRUCTOR UJIIE MAGOSHIRŌ.
JUST BETWEEN YOU AND ME, THAT IS...

KŌETSU.

...I WANT HIM TO CHALLENGE A REPUTABLE FIGHTER HERE IN KYOTO.
SINCE WE'VE COME ALL THIS WAY...

...

SOMEONE SUCH AS THE INVINCIBLE...

...MIYAMOTO MUSASHI.

...!!

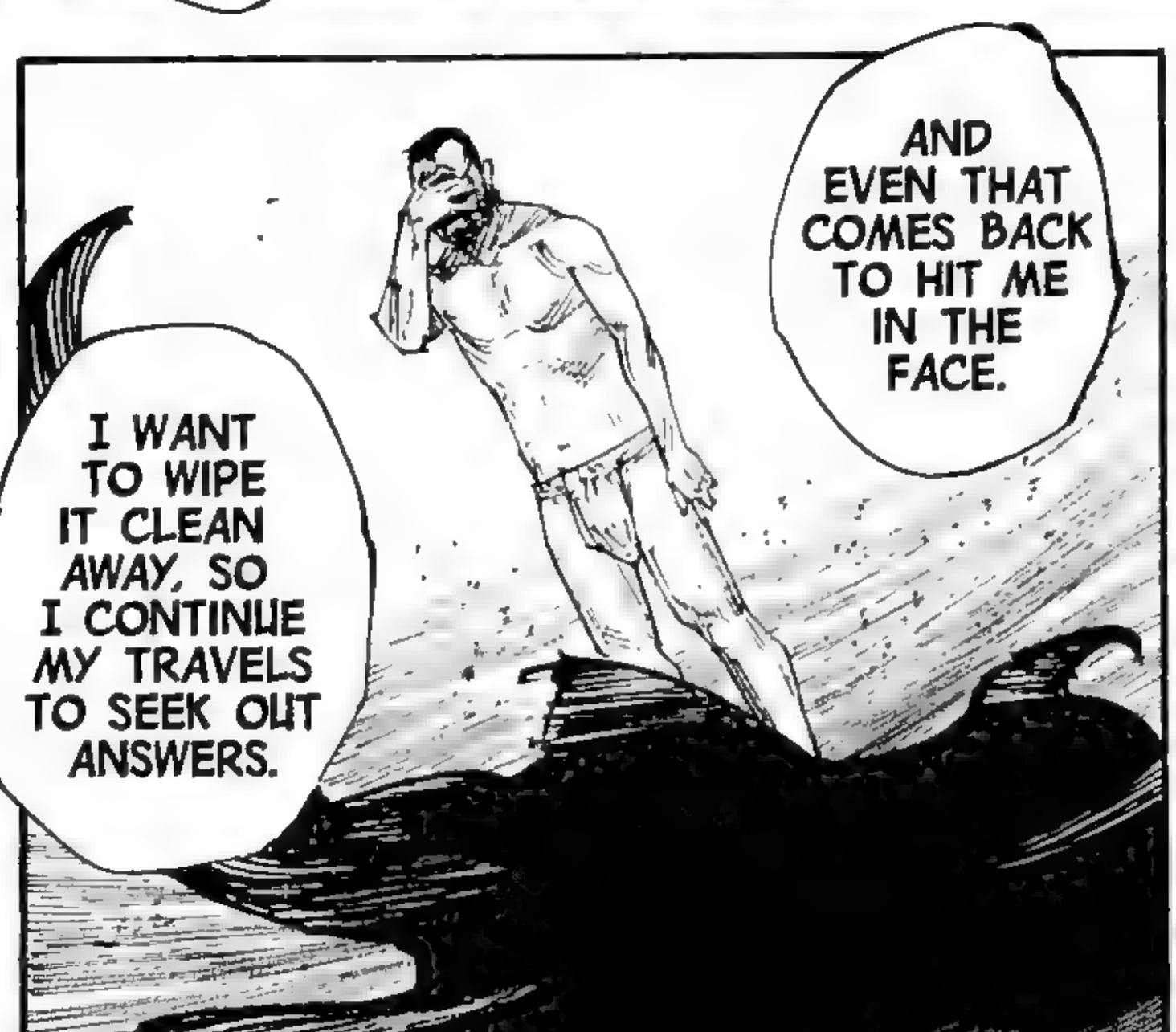
ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT ME?!

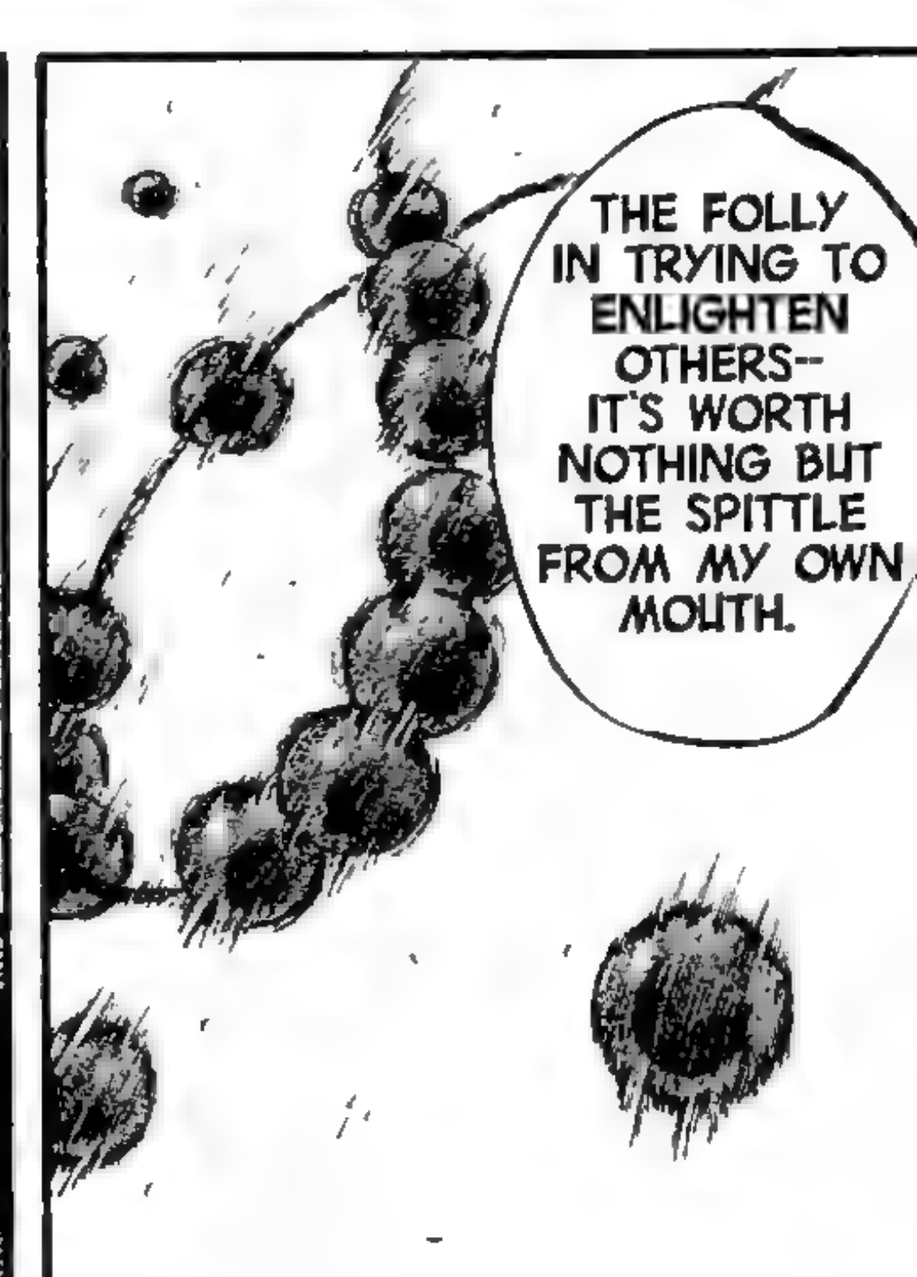
INCLUDING MYSELF.

WHAT WAS INSIDE OF ME...
THAT WAS WHAT YOU NEVER WANTED TO SEE.
I MEANT EVERY-ONE.

WHAT PURPOSE IS THERE IN FINDING...
...THE ULTIMATE ANSWER.

DESPON-DENT OVER OURSELVES.


AND EVEN THAT COMES BACK TO HIT ME IN THE FACE.
I WANT TO WIPE IT CLEAN AWAY, SO I CONTINUE MY TRAVELS TO SEEK OUT ANSWERS.


THE FOLLY IN TRYING TO ENLIGHTEN OTHERS-- IT'S WORTH NOTHING BUT THE SPITTLE FROM MY OWN MOUTH.

THAT'S HOW I REALIZED...

...WE SUFFER MOST IN THIS WORLD WHEN WE LACK A CONNECTION TO THE HEAVENS.

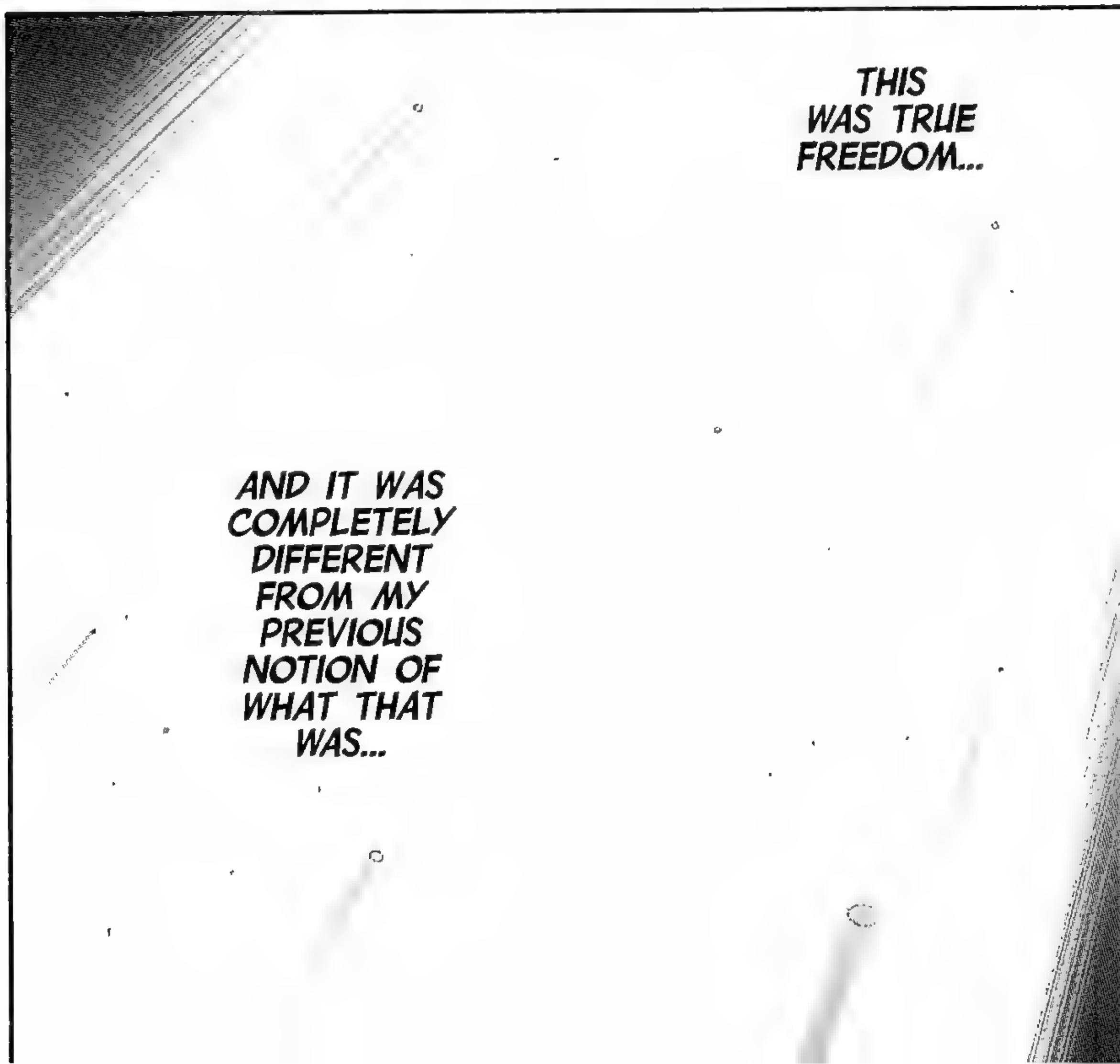
YOU JUST HAVE TO ACCEPT IT FOR WHAT IT IS.

IF THERE IS SOME HIGHER PURPOSE TO LIFE...

...THEN YOU JUST HAVE TO LET IT BE.

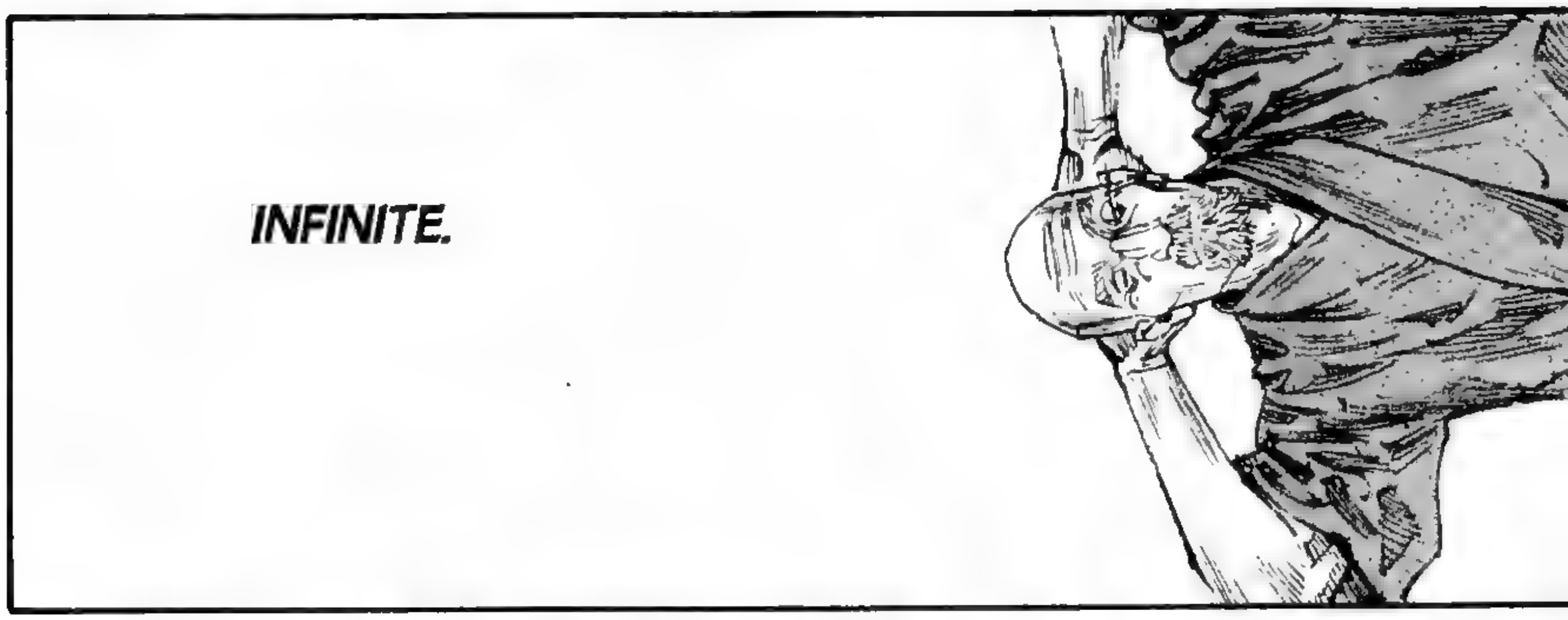
THEN THE DOORS OPENED UP.

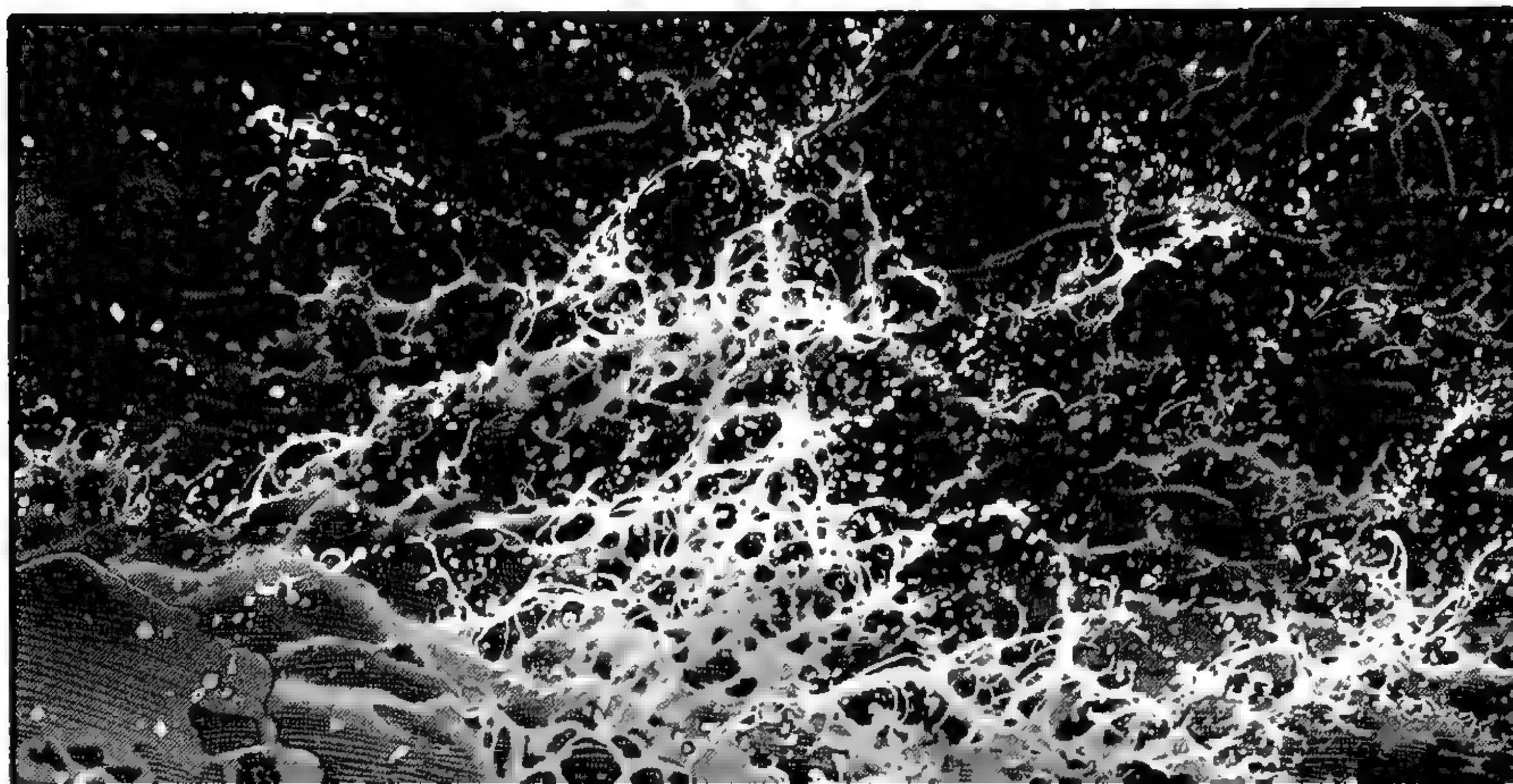
ALL THESE DOORS THAT WERE SHUT SUDDENLY OPENED WIDE...


THIS WAS TRUE FREEDOM...
AND IT WAS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FROM MY PREVIOUS NOTION OF WHAT THAT WAS...

WE ARE
INFINITE.

!

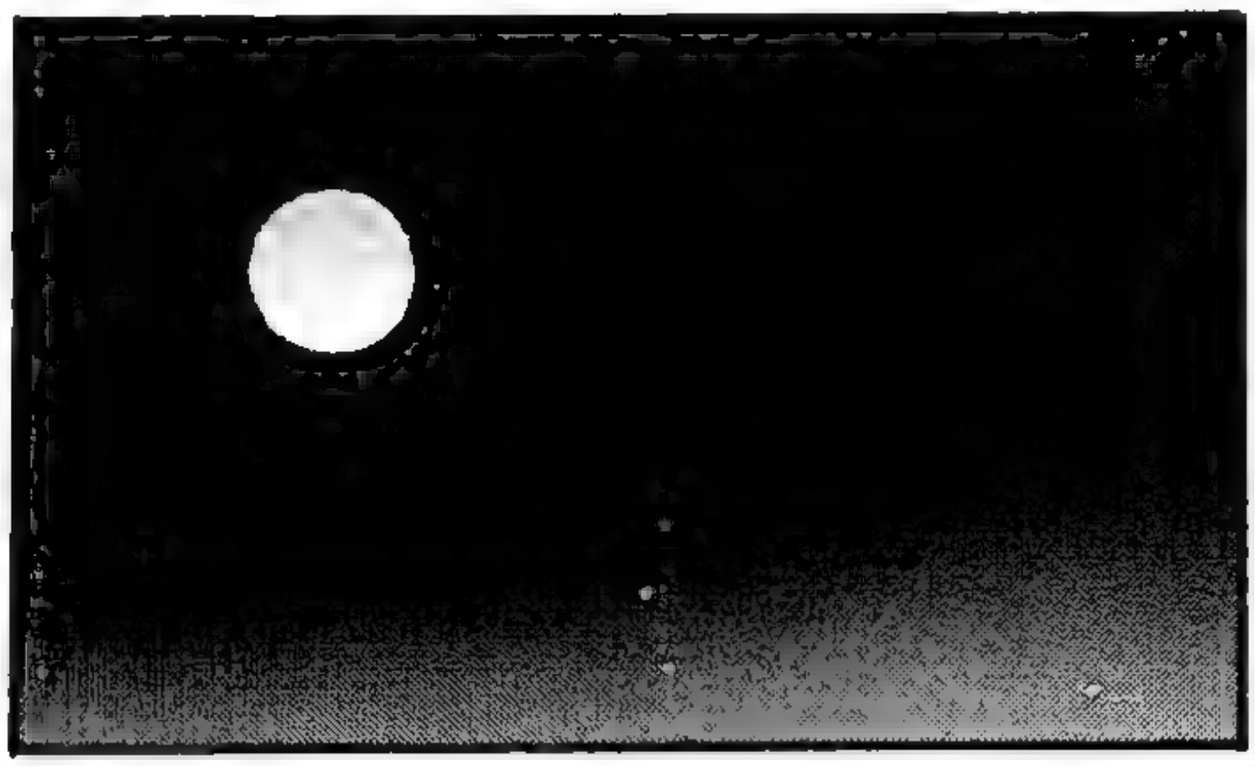

INFINITE.



THEY'VE BEEN PREORDAINED BY THE HEAVENS.

ALL OUR INDIVIDUAL PATHS...

AND IT'S FOR THAT VERY REASON THAT WE ARE FREE.

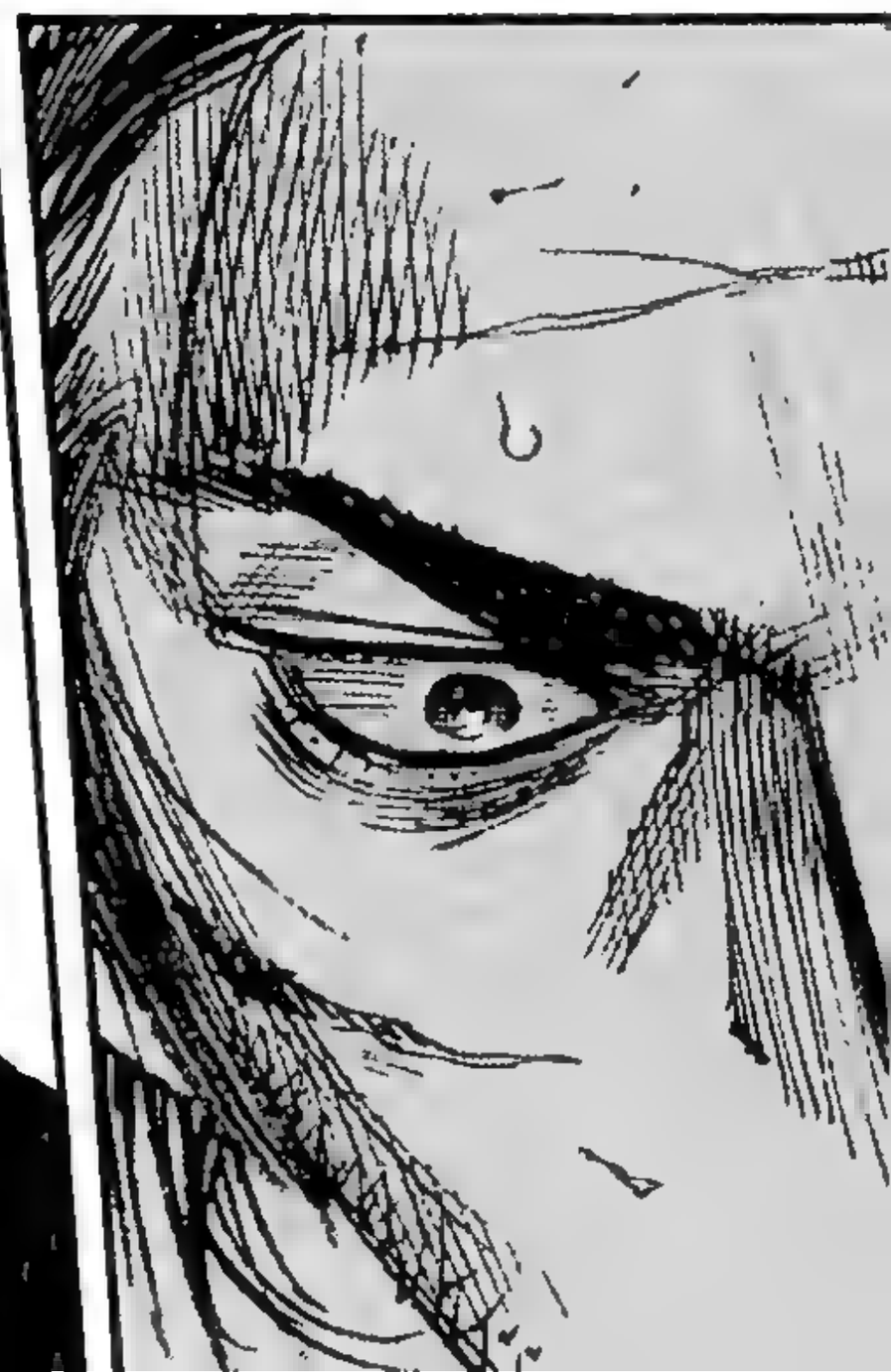


...AS LONG AS WE RELEASE OURSELVES, OUR VERY ESSENCE, UP TO THE HEAVENS.

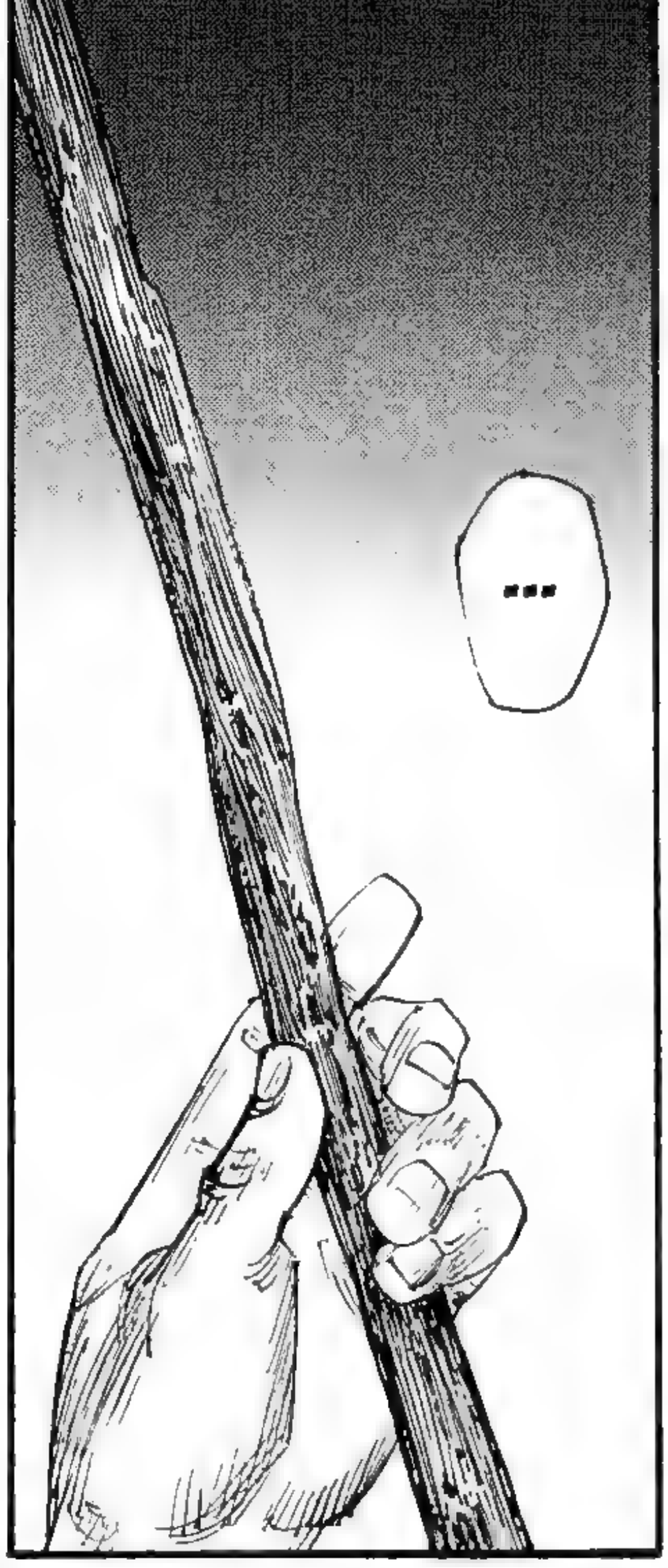
.....
WITH ALL THE SUFFERING THAT YOU FACE NOW, I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT UNDERSTAND...
MUSASHI ...
WHETHER YOU TRULY WON YOUR BATTLE AGAINST THE 70 MEN OF THE YOSHIOKA OR NOT...
...WHAT YOU ARE SUFFERING IS SOMETHING THAT NOT ANOTHER SOUL CAN POSSIBLY COMPREHEND.

IN ALL THE WORLD, THERE'S NOT A SINGLE PERSON...

...WHO CAN UNDERSTAND YOUR SUFFERING.



DESPITE ALL THAT, YOU ARE STILL INDEED CONNECTED TO THE HEAVENS.



MUSASHI...
...YOU MUST SEE THAT NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS, YOU ARE ALWAYS CONNECTED TO THE HEAVENS.
ONLY...
...YOU MUST DESIRE IT TO BE SO.

#258 The Inner Light

SO IN THE END, PRAYING IS ALL THAT WE CAN DO.

IT'S MORE THAN JUST ALL THAT WE CAN DO...

NEITHER IS IT AN END.

A PRAYER IS WHERE IT ALL BEGINS.

ZING

NGHH ...

...!!

...AT ANY TIME.

WE CAN PRAY...

WHO OR WHAT DO YOU PRAY TO, MUSASHI ?

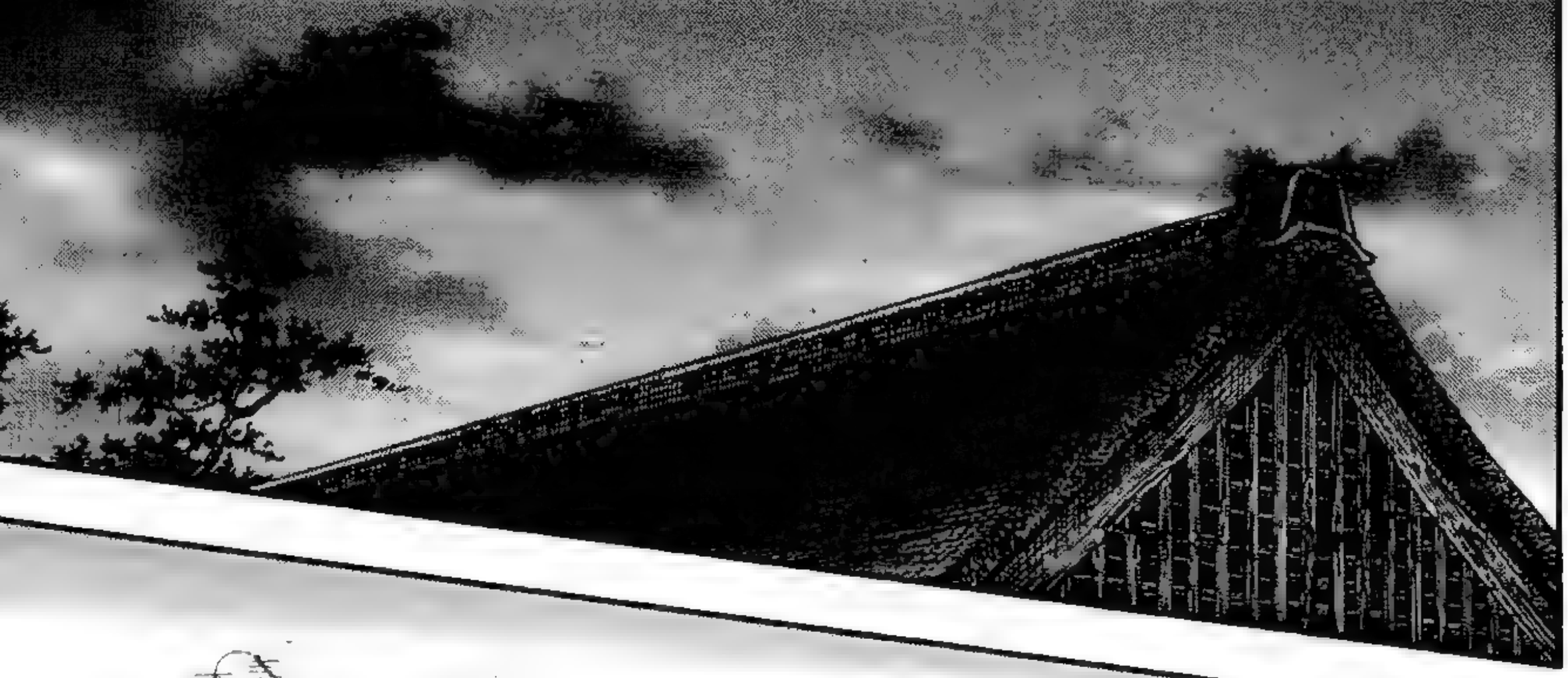
"THE PATH YOU'VE TAKEN" MAY BE IMPORTANT... BUT LET US PRAY TO THE HEAVENS.

DOES EVERY-THING STILL REVOLVE AROUND YOU?
SUN'S GOING DOWN...

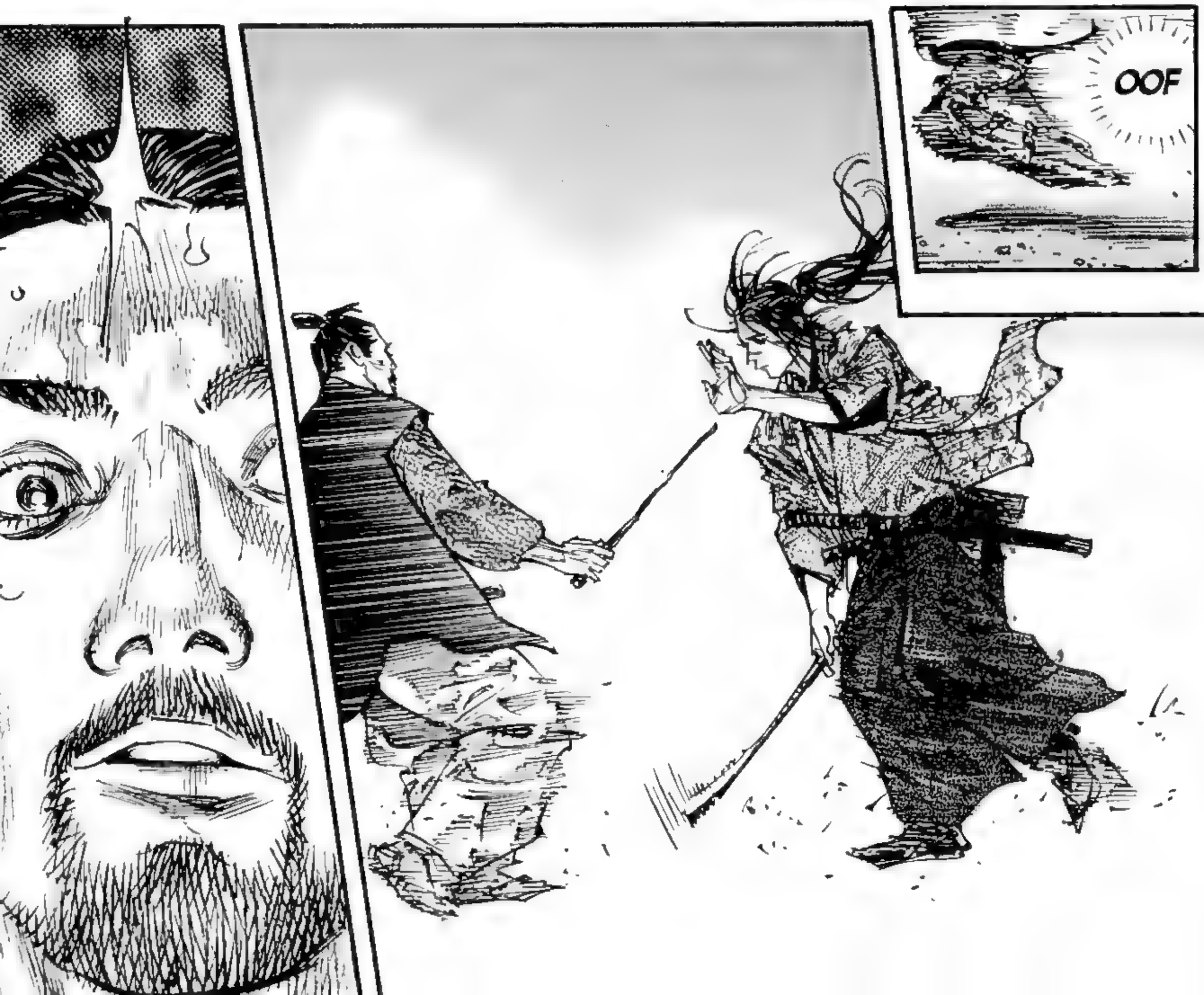
NO, THAT'S NOT EXACTLY IT...

THE PATH I'VE TAKEN.

WE CAN'T SEE THE STARS FROM HERE...
...BUT LET US PRAY WITH THE HEAVENS IN OUR HEARTS.



FSSH


OOF

NO...

YOU'LL HAVE TO FORGIVE ME THAT THOUGHT.

NO...

A TWIG AND SWORD ARE DIFFERENT.

THIS IS A NEW EXPERIENCE FOR ME.

I HAVE NEVER FACED AN OPPONENT SUPERIOR TO ME...

THE TWIG IS DIFFERENT FROM THE SWORD...

ONLY IN THAT MY EXPERIENCE WIELDING THE TWIG IS FAR LACKING.

PERHAPS HE'S HAVING STOMACH PROB-LEMS.
OGAWA!

AT TIMES EVEN MY OWN SWORD SURPRISES ME...

IT IS SO FAST ...

...AND POWER-FUL.

AT TIMES LIKE THAT...

HM?

...WHEN MY SWORD IS FEELING JUST RIGHT...

...THE INSIDE OF MY BODY...
...FEELS LIKE IT'S SHINING.
AND I FEEL THE URGE...
...TO LAUGH.

IT MAKES ME FEEL LIKE PRAYING.
THAT LIGHT...
...THAT'S WHAT YOU MEANT WHEN YOU REFERRED TO "THE HEAVENS IN YOUR HEART," RIGHT?

TUGG

I SEE...

"I'M CONNECTED TO THE HEAVENS."

I THINK I UNDERSTAND.

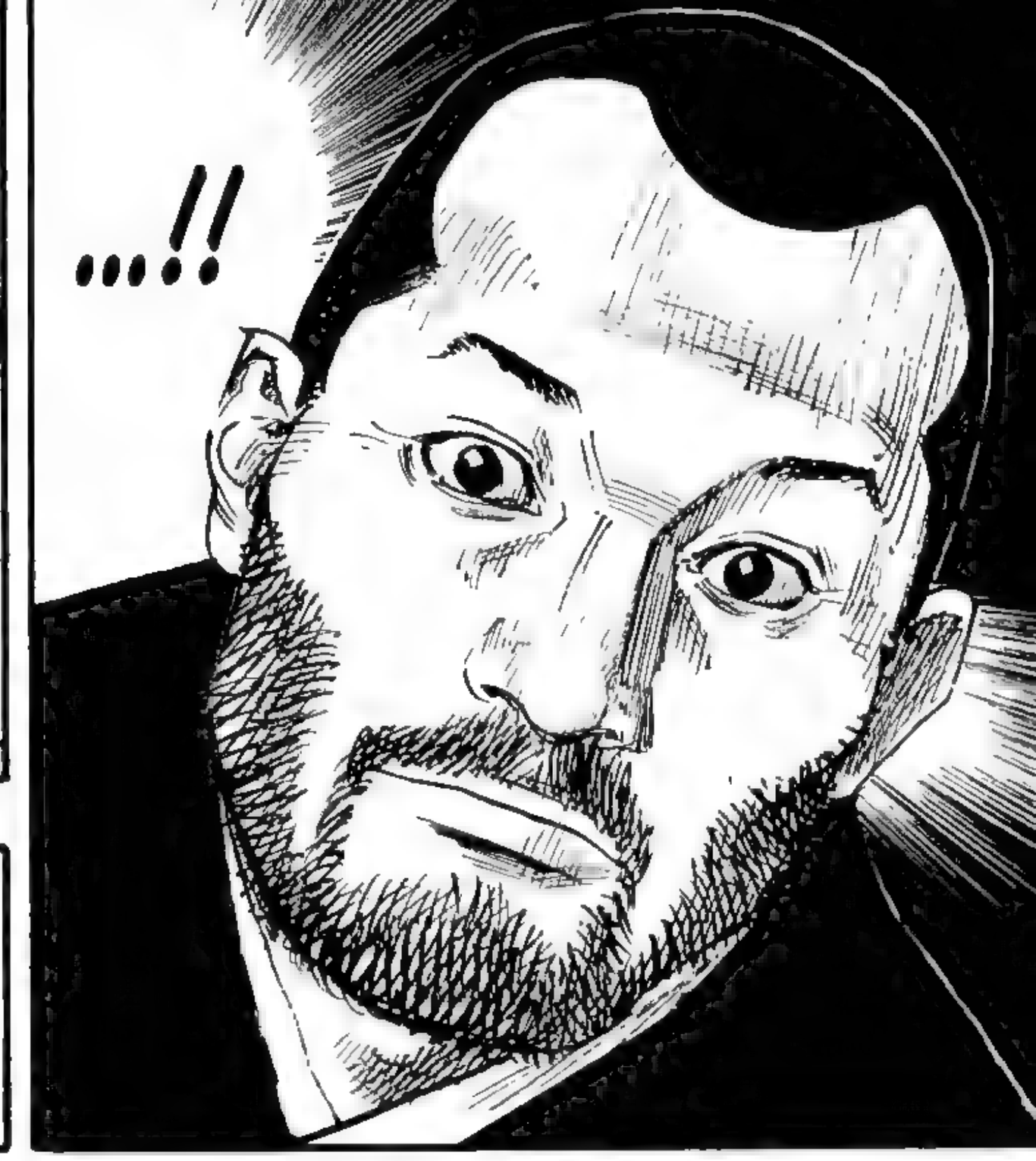
IT'S FREE AND...

THE FIRMER YOU GRASP THE SWORD...

YES...

...INFINITE.

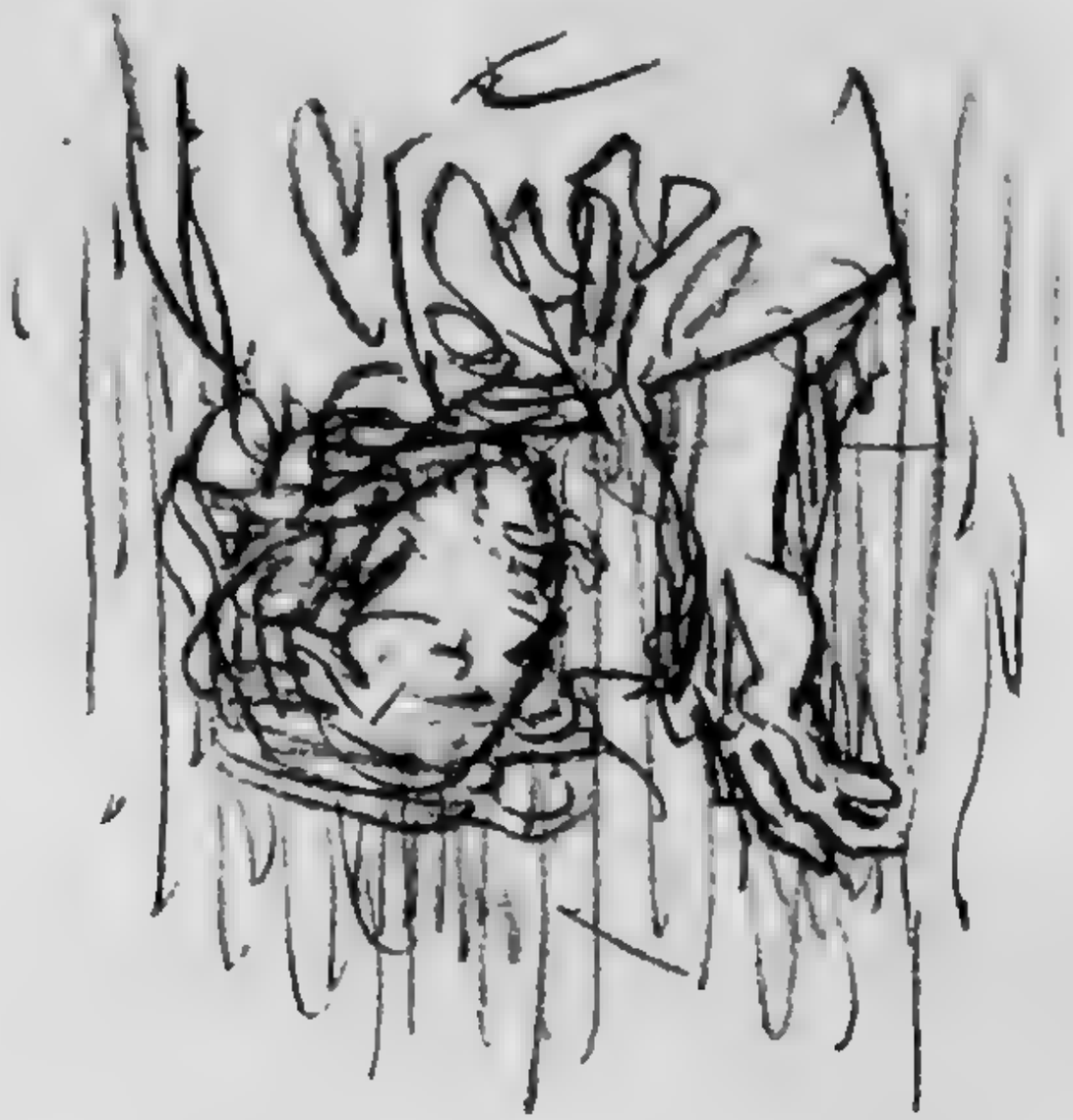
...
YAWN...


...!!

SORRY, TAKUAN.

HMM...
MY BODY NEEDS TO HEAL.
SORRY...
I'M FEELING SO SLEEPY.

ZZZ...
ZZZ...
ZZZ...



#259 | The Twig

...!!

HMM...

THE SMELL OF HOME...

THE SMELL OF THE OCEAN...

I WAS ONLY ACCOMPANYING MY LORD.

...NOW I'M OUTSIDE OF THE HON'AMI RESIDENCE.

WE CAME ALL THE WAY FROM KOKURA...

HOW CAN THAT BE?

KYOTO'S SO FAR FROM THE OCEAN.

WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

BEFORE ME NOW STANDS THE FAMOUS GANRYU...

HE'S SO RELAXED... WHAT PRESENCE.
SASAKI KOJIRŌ...
KRIK
KRIK
...

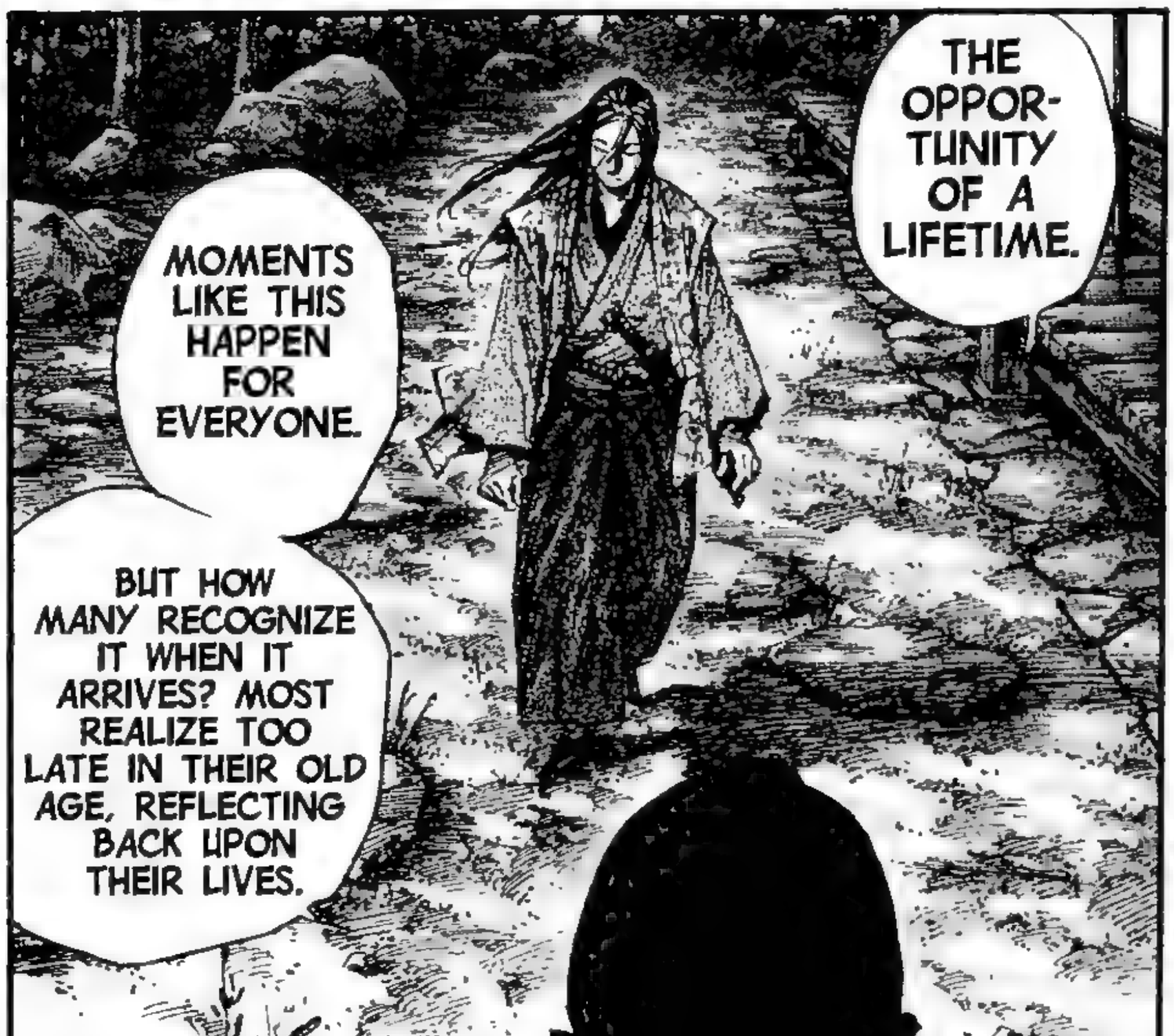
I'M CALM...

I'M NOT OVER-REACTING.

BUT MY NAME IS OGAWA IENAO.

I KNOW YOU CAN'T HEAR ME.

I BELIEVE IT WAS ALL FOR THIS ENCOUNTER ...
ALL FOR THIS VERY MATCH.
I'VE DEVOTED MY LIFE TO THE SWORD...


MOMENTS LIKE THIS HAPPEN FOR EVERYONE.
BUT HOW MANY RECOGNIZE IT WHEN IT ARRIVES? MOST REALIZE TOO LATE IN THEIR OLD AGE, REFLECTING BACK UPON THEIR LIVES.
THE OPPOR-TUNITY OF A LIFETIME.

I AM FORTU-NATE.

I AM GRATEFUL FOR KNOWING THAT THIS IS THE MOMENT FOR ME.

YOU STILL WIELD THE TWIG?!

AHH--

AUHH...

SHUF
VERY WELL...

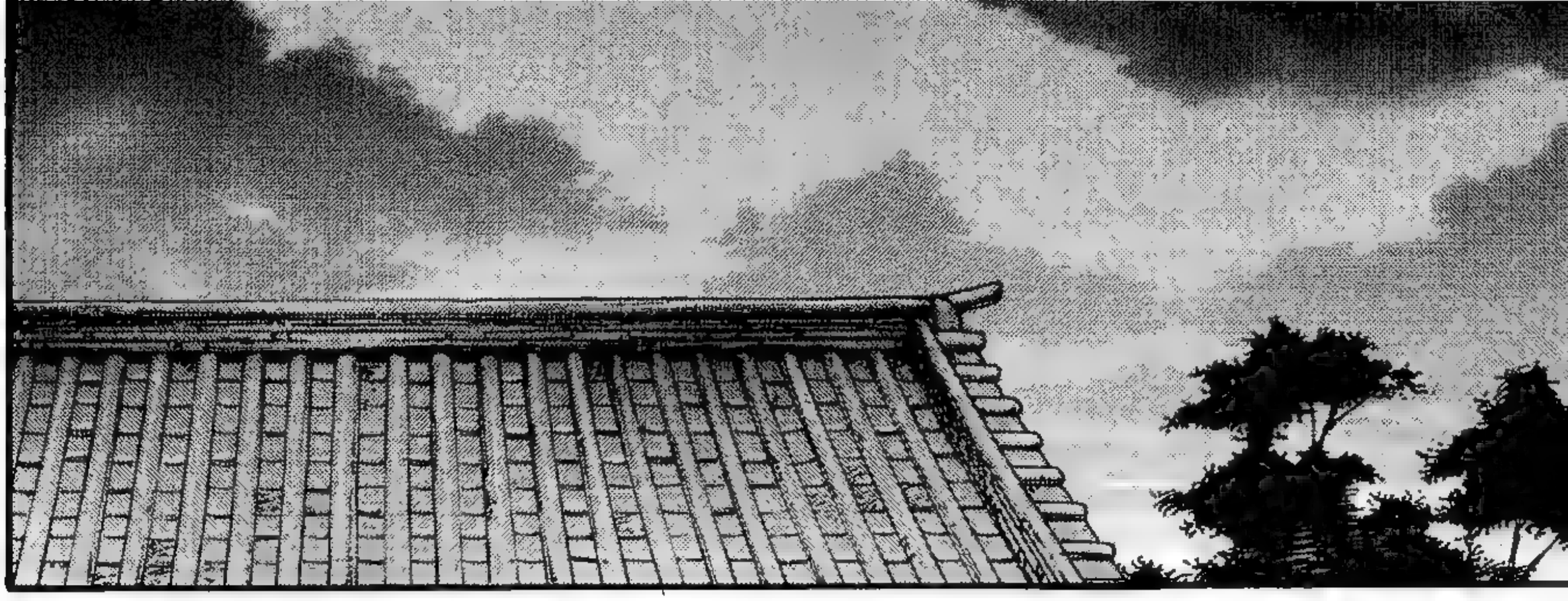
...

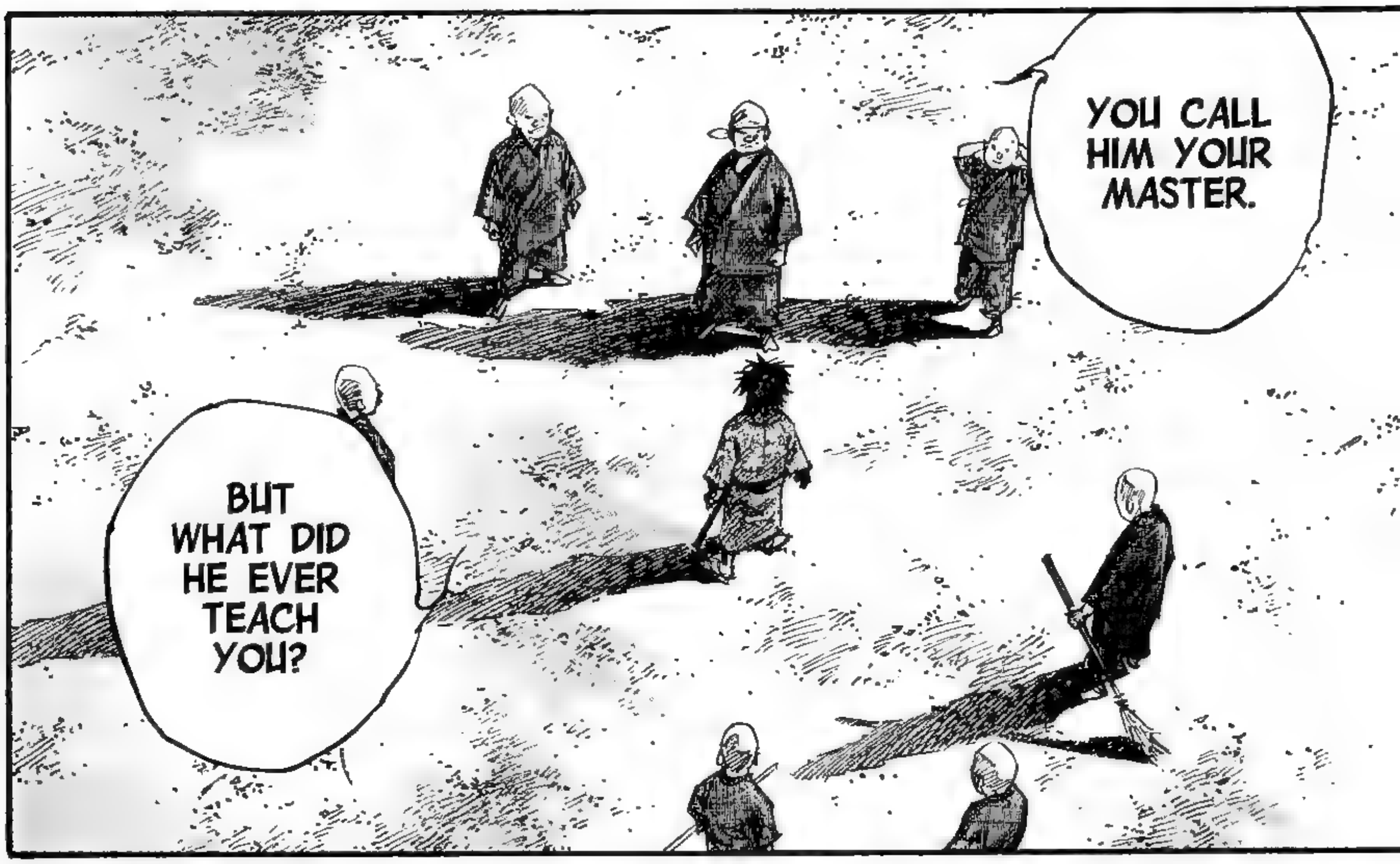
IF THAT'S YOUR CHOICE, THEN SO BE IT.

SHUF
SHUF

YOU CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON...

AND I'LL CHOOSE MINE.




YOU CALL HIM YOUR MASTER.
BUT WHAT DID HE EVER TEACH YOU?

...

A BLOOD-THIRSTY DEMON.
BUT DURING TIMES OF PEACE, HE'S NOTHING MORE THAN A BEAST.
KILLING 70 MEN MAY HAVE BEEN A HEROIC FEAT...

THAT'S WHAT OUR HEAD PRIEST SAID.

SHUT UP!

I MEAN HE DIDN'T FIGHT FOR A WAR. HE FOUGHT THE YOSHIOKA FOR HIMSELF.

RIGHT?

"KILLING 70 MEN FOR HIS OWN SAKE IS BEYOND BEASTLY."

OH, SO NOW YOU WANT TO FIGHT!

YOU AND YOUR WISE MOUTH! WHAT WOULD A BUNCH OF MONKS KNOW?!

WE'RE UNARMED!

YOU REALLY DO TAKE AFTER THAT BEAST!

SHUN

!!

TAKE THIS!

GET HIM!

URR...

HM?

THAT'S IT!
Y-YOU... BASTARDS!
DEMON CHILD!

I SAID, STOP IT!
NO FIGHT-ING!

HEY! STOP THAT!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING!?
SHUT UP.
YOU BEAST!
YOU BETTER TAKE BACK WHAT YOU SAID ABOUT MY MASTER!

YIKES!

YOU DON'T WANT TO DEAL WITH ME!!

I TOLD YOU DAMN BRATS TO STOP!!

WAHH!

A DEMON LADY!

AIEE!

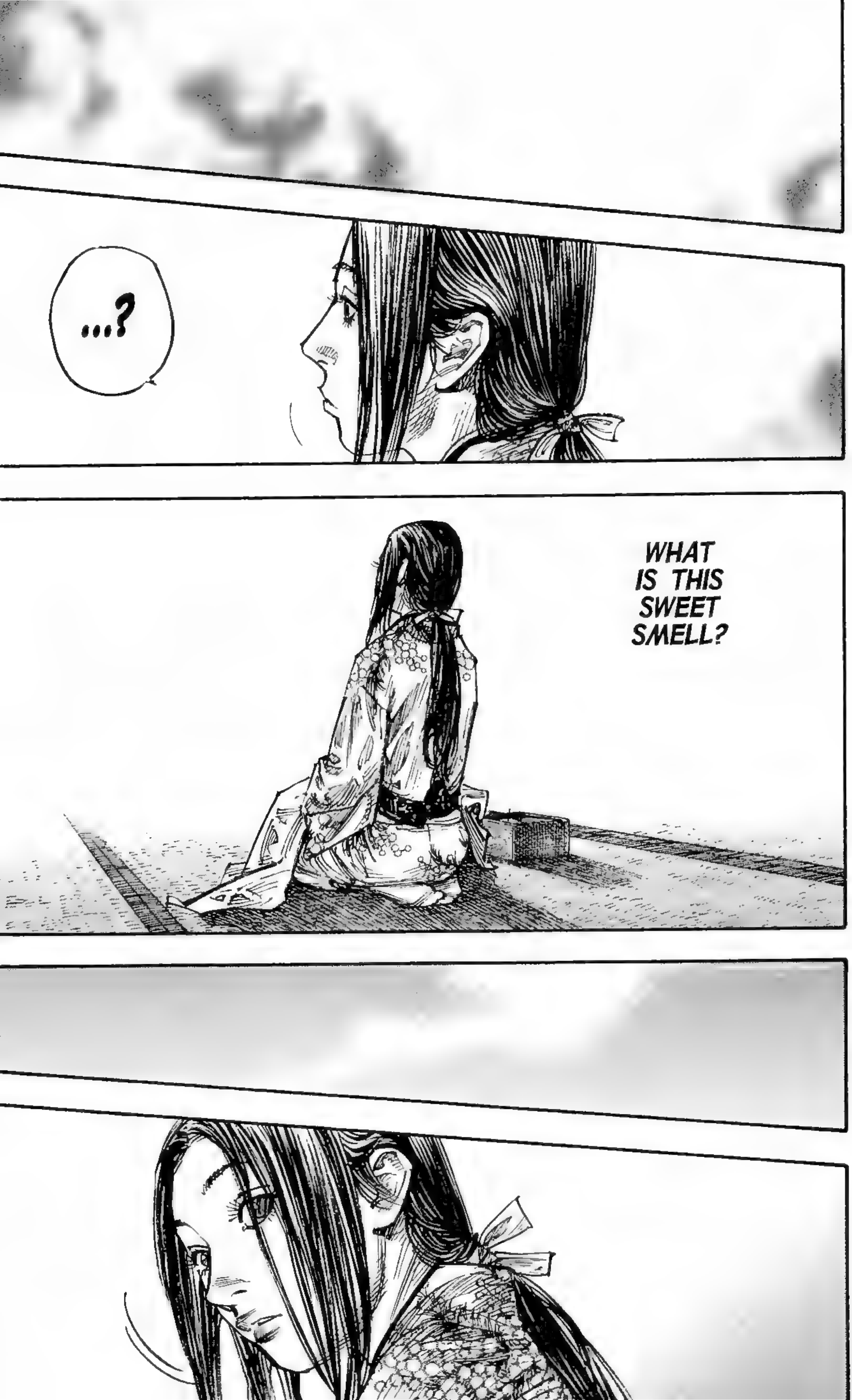
...A DEMON, A BEAST...
THEY CALLED MY MASTER ...

...

SOME THINGS DON'T CHANGE. EVERYONE USED TO CALL HIM THAT WHEN WE WERE CHILDREN...
BEAST...
DEMON ...

DOESN'T HE CARE HOW OTHERS SEE HIM...?
I COULDN'T STAND IT.

A DEMON CHILD...
...BEAST.
A WILD ANIMAL ...


...?
WHAT IS THIS SWEET SMELL?

.....

I WANT TO SPEND MY LIFE WITH HIM...
...TO-GETHER.

NOW THAT HE CAN'T FIGHT ANYMORE, HE'LL PROBABLY SPEND HIS LIFE WITH YOU.

.....

BUT HIS IDEA AND MY IDEA OF HAPPINESS AREN'T THE SAME.

I WOULDN'T WANT TO STAND IN HIS WAY.

...HAPPILY.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?

I DON'T KNOW.

...

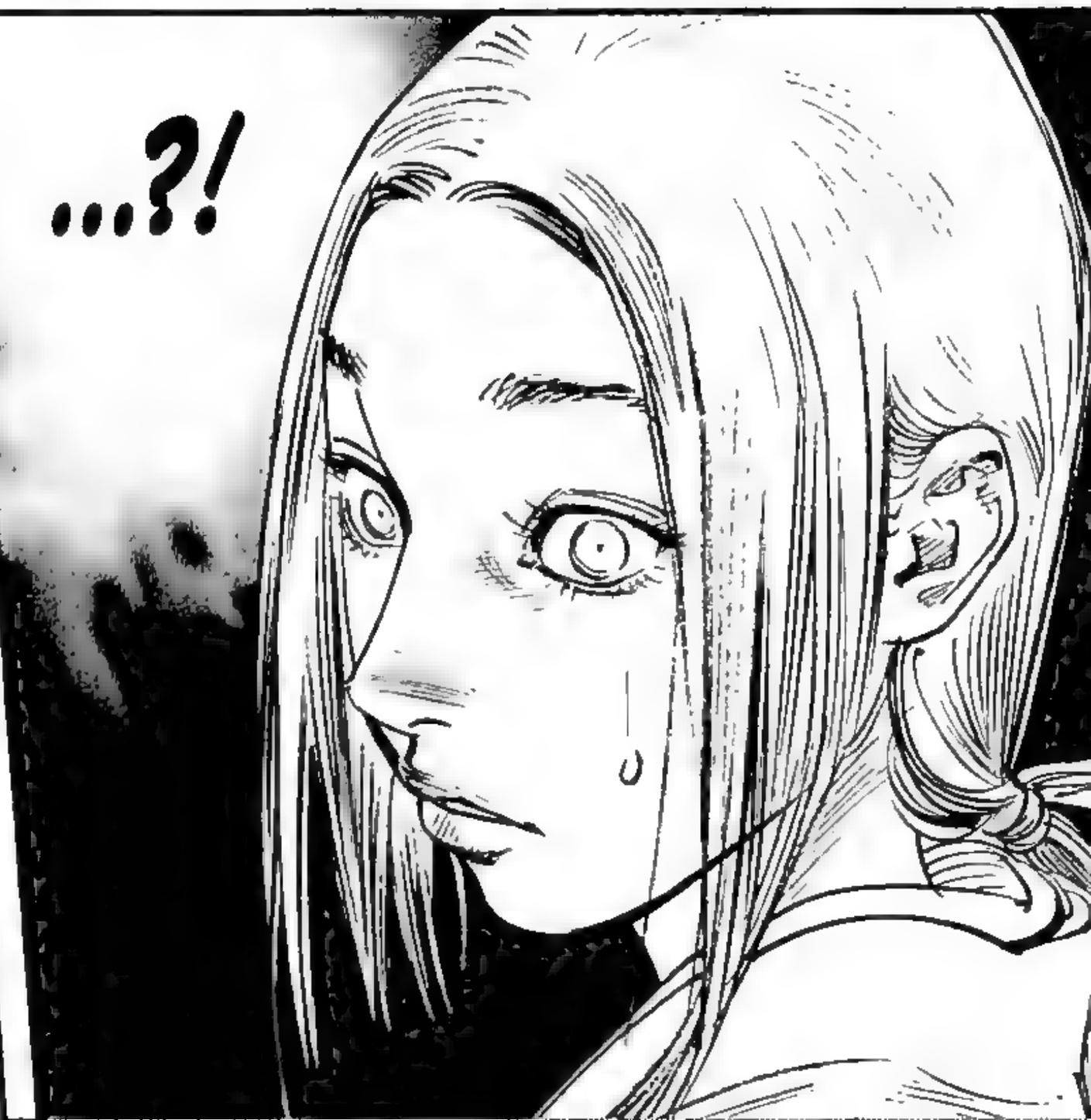
SOMETHING...

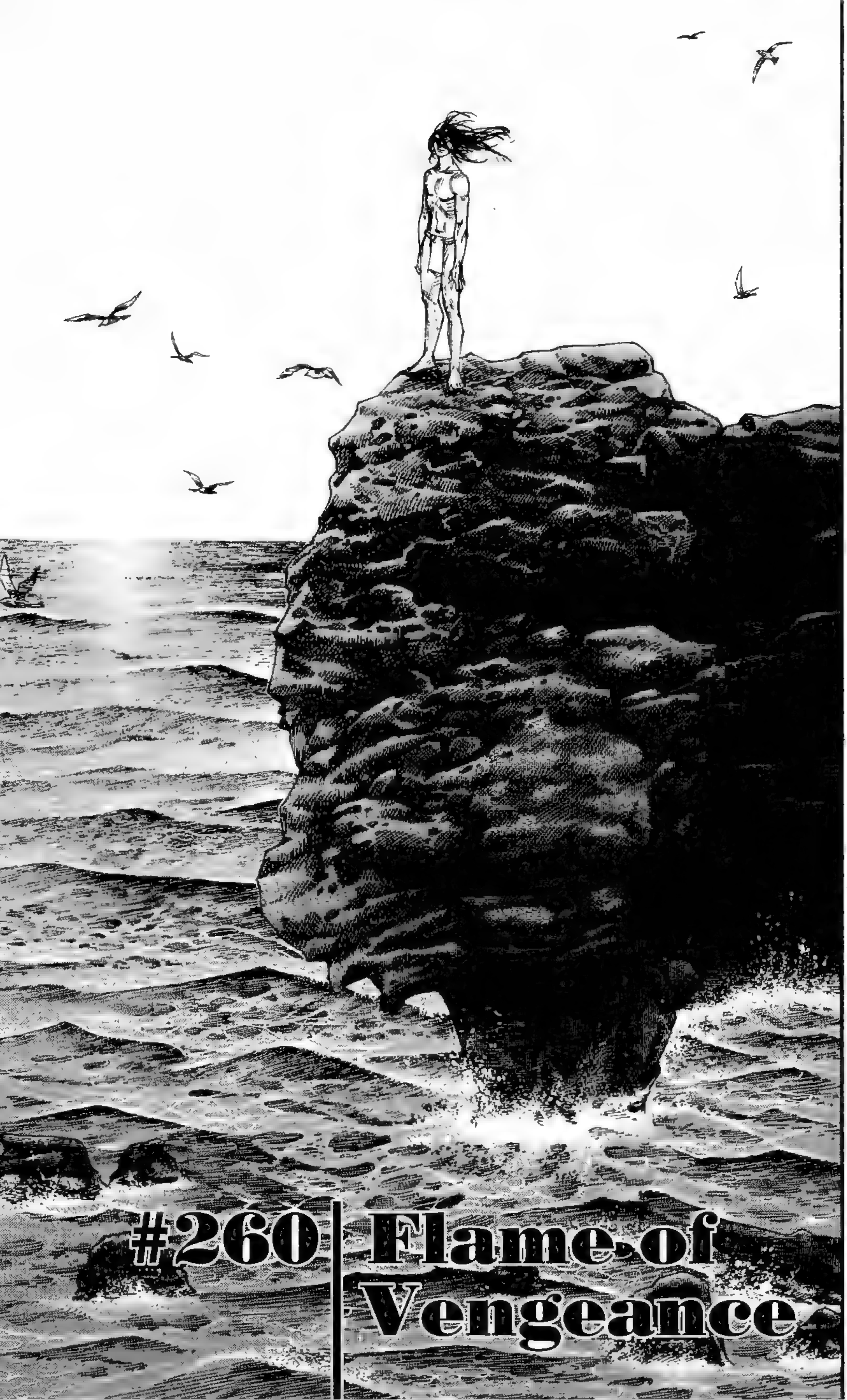
...THAT WILL MAKE HIM HAPPY...

HAPPY, HM?

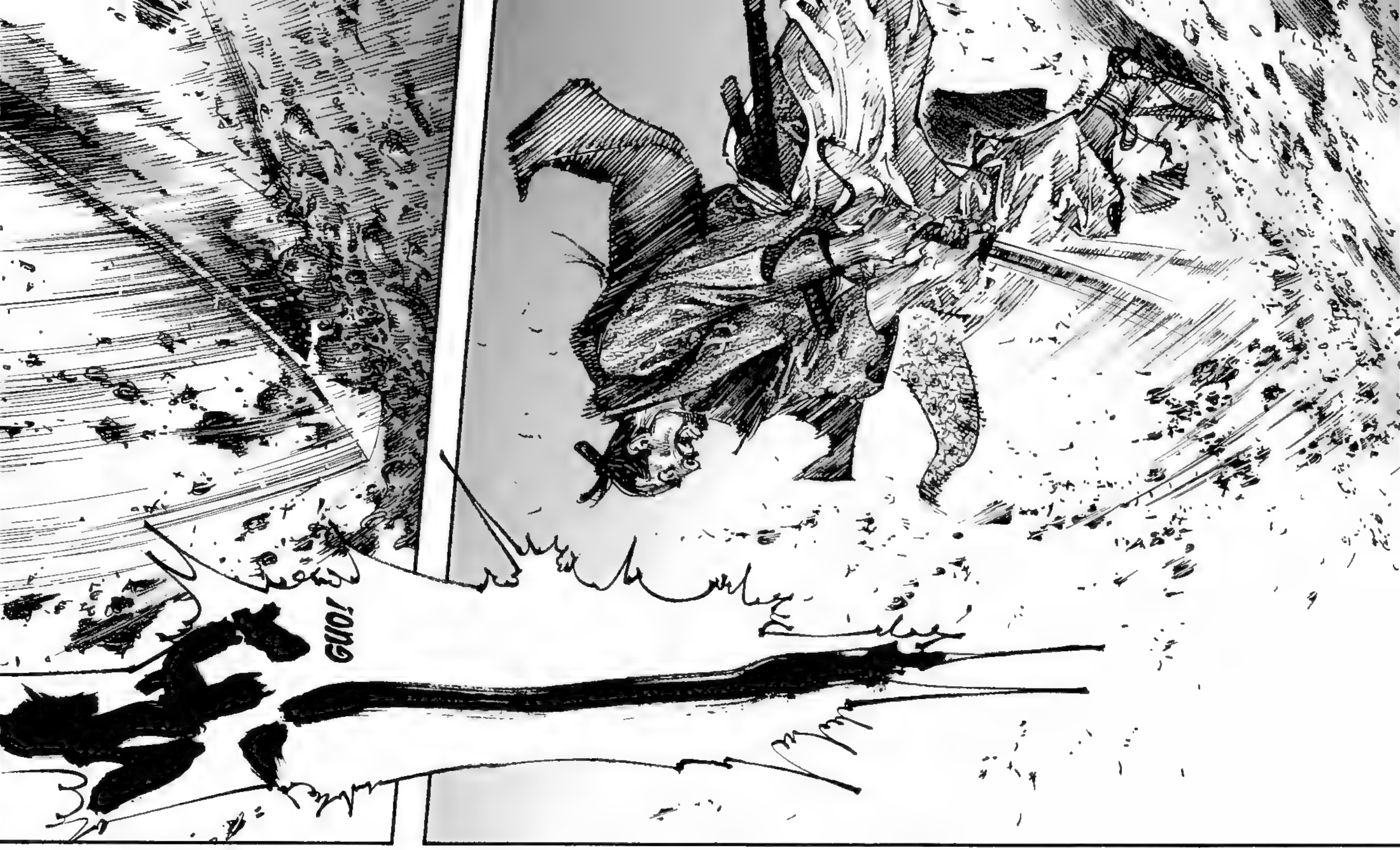
HE HAS TO BEAR THE BURDEN OF THE SUFFERING OF 70 MEN.

I DOUBT HE CAN AFFORD TO BE HAPPY...




#260
Flame of Vengeance

AND I'LL CHOOSE MINE.
YOU CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON.
THAT'S ALL THERE IS TO IT.


GUIO!

OGAWA!

OGAWA.

I HEARD YOUR BLOOD-CURDLING BATTLE CRY...
ARE YOU PRACTICING HERE WITHOUT EVEN INTRODUCING YOURSELF TO KŌETSU ?
I APPRECIATE YOUR ENTHUSIASM, BUT...
...?!

I CAN'T MOVE...

UMM...

UNLESS THIS VENGEFUL FLAME INSIDE OF ME SMOLDERS OUT...

...IT APPEARS AS IF I'M HERE TO STAY.

...!!

MUSASHI CAN'T ESCAPE FROM THIS VICIOUS SPIRAL.

I'D RECOMMEND YOU STAY AWAY FROM HIM, YOUNG LADY.

THERE WILL BE HORDES OF MEN COMING AFTER HIM...

SOME IN A MOST TREACHEROUS, BARBAROUS FASHION.

MUSASHI'S INDOMITABLE REPUTATION WILL SOON BE ETCHED IN STONE...

JUST AS MUSASHI...

...ONCE DID TO US.

WHO...
WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?!
KOJIRŌ ...
OGAWA !!

GASP
KOJIRŌ?

.....
OGAWA ...
OGAWA!!

YOU DEFEATED HIM WITH THAT TWIG...?!
HOW IN THE WORLD...?
IWAMA!
HE HAS NO PULSE.
KOJIRŌ? AS IN...

...THE SASAKI KOJIRŌ?!

...AND SHE'S HUNCHED OVER A LITTLE.
HER HAIR IS GREY...

I DON'T KNOW. DOES SHE SOUND FAMILIAR ?
NOT REALLY ...
I THOUGHT SHE MIGHT BE STAYING AT AN INN SOMEWHERE CLOSE BY.
SHE'S ONLY ABOUT SO TALL...

WE WERE TRAVELING TOGETHER BUT GOT SEPARATED. SHE'S MY MOTHER...

SHE WAS HOLLERING, "DESPITE ITS OVERBLOWN PRICE, YOUR MEDICINE HAD HARDLY ANY AFFECT ON ME!"

SHE WAS SO LOUD AND CANTANKEROUS THAT FELLOW PROBABLY GAVE IN.

YOU BET HE DID.

HA HA HA!

SHE WAS HAVING A ROW WITH THE MEDICINE MERCHANT.

THAT'S RIGHT.

MAYBE IT'S THAT OLD WOMAN FROM THE OTHER DAY...

SHE HAD GREY HAIR AND A CANE.

THAT'S HER!

THAT WAS HER?

I'M SURE OF IT!

DO YOU KNOW WHERE SHE'S STAYING?!

FICH
FICH

WITH ALL THOSE LIES I TOLD...
...I LOST TRACK OF THE TRUTH.

KOFF KOFF

HUF

...WHAT TRULY MATTERS MOST.

AND IT'S ONLY NOW THAT I REALIZE...

HUF

HUF

IT'S NOT TOO LATE FOR ME TO START OVER.

KOFF

KOFF

HAK

URR

HAK

!

Vagabond

End of volume 29